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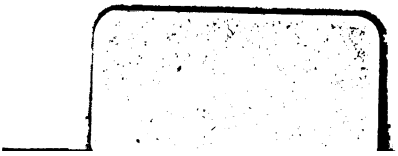

LITERARY LIVES

EDITED BY

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL

CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND HER SISTERS

LITERARY LIVES

Edited by W. Robertson Nicoll, LL.D.

MATTHEW ARNOLD. By G. W. E. Russell.

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CHARLOTTE BRONTË

AND HER SISTERS

BY

CLEMENT K. SHORTER

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Charlotte Brontë (Mrs. Arthur Bell Nicholls)

From the portrait by George Richmond in the possession of Mr. A. B. Nicholls

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book may seem at first sight only an untoward accident, due to the exigencies of including all well known names in a series entitled "Literary Lives." Mrs. Gaskell, it may be said, wrote the only *Life* of Charlotte Brontë that everyone should read. This is, in a measure, true, but much new material has been published since Mrs. Gaskell wrote, and this material has not in the interval been gathered together into one brief narrative. I have to thank Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton for any facts of that kind previously published in my *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, and Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. for the same indulgence with regard to the Haworth Edition of Mrs. Gaskell's *Life*, to which I was privileged to add many notes. The Haworth Edition of Mrs. Gaskell's *Life* must for ever hold the field against others by virtue of its mass of documents provided by the late Mr. George Smith. I have added certain other un-

published material to this little book although this will be discerned only by the Brontë enthusiast who knows the subject, as my friend the late Lionel Johnson knew it, in its minutest detail.

Perhaps I shall best disarm criticism by stating that I have tried to let Charlotte Brontë tell her own story through the letters by her that have been brought to light since Mrs. Gaskell wrote.

I have to thank two kind friends who love the Brontës, Mrs. Wilfrid Meynell and Dr. Robertson Nicoll, for reading my proof-sheets.

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CHAPTER I

THE FATHER OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

PATRICK BRONTË,[1] or Brunty, the father of Charlotte Brontë, was an Irishman. He was born in a humble cottage in Emdale, County Down, on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1777. Although he came from the "Black North," from that particular part of Ireland where Protestantism flourishes, largely through the infusion of English and

[1] In the Baptismal Register of Drumballyroney the name is entered "Brunty" and "Bruntee"; in the books of St. John's College, Cambridge, on Patrick Brontë's admission in 1802–3 it is entered as Branty, in the Churchwardens' books at Hartshead "Brunty." But there seems to be no early signature of Patrick Brontë's extant, and certainly no signature of his Irish period, unless the inscription "Patrick Brunty, his book" which Dr. Wright saw in an old "Arithmetic" may be counted genuine, which I do not believe. A "Frank Prunty" was found by Mr. David Martin at Newtonbutler in Co. Fermanagh, and he claimed a distant relationship to the Brontës. At Cambridge Mr. Brontë signed "Bronte," at Wethersfield "Bronté," at Dewsbury Brontē or Brontȅ or Brontέ. Not until he arrived at Haworth do we find his signature as Brontë.

Scots blood, there is no evidence that there was a particle of blood other than Irish flowing in the veins of Patrick Brunty. His parents were of the peasant class, although his father, Hugh Brunty, would seem to have followed for a long period a number of varied occupations, including work in a limekiln and work in a cornkiln. The book to which we owe the only glimpse of Patrick's parentage, *The Brontës in Ireland*, by Dr. Wright, is so full of invention that it is difficult to derive therefrom fragments of truth concerning the earlier Brontës, or Bruntys. It would seem clear, however, that Hugh Brunty married one Alice McClory, who had been brought up in the Roman Catholic faith, but who, after her marriage in the Protestant Church of Magherally, adopted the religion of her husband.[1] Ten children were born to Hugh and Alice Brunty, and of these Patrick, the eldest, alone has any interest for us.

After such education as the village school afforded, young Patrick Brunty became a weaver,

[1] The Brontes in Ireland, or Facts Stranger than Fiction, by Dr. William Wright, 1893.

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Born March 17, 1777 *Died June* 7, 1861

The Rev. Patrick Brontë

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an industry then, as now, extensively cultivated through Ulster. He could not have been more than sixteen years of age when he took the position of teacher in the Glascar Presbyterian School, about a mile from the Brunty cottage at Emdale. A year or two later Patrick became teacher of the parish school of Drumballyroney, and there, during his three years of schoolmastering (it is suggested that he may have saved the sum of a hundred pounds or so. This enabled him to leave Ireland for Cambridge, where he entered himself at St. John's College on October 1, 1802, changing his name from Brunty to Brontë at this time.[1] In April of that year another Irishman, Henry John Temple, who was also educated at St. John's, succeeded his father as Viscount Palmerston. Years later Mr. Brontë wrote to the popular Minister on a local question, but the formality of his reply makes it probable that the peer and the whilom

[1] Whether the name was assumed in honour of Nelson, who about this time became Duke of Bronte, or whether his early enthusiasm for Greek guided his change of name is not known. His eldest daughter long afterwards signed herself in play as Charlotte or rather as Charles Thunder.

peasant were never on speaking terms. Palmerston was at St. John's from April, 1803, to January, 1806.

We have his own statement, written in a copy of Henry Kirke White's *Verses*, that Brontë knew the unfortunate young poet from Nottingham. Kirke White became a sizar at St. John's in 1803, through the influence of the once famous divine, Charles Simeon. The one real friendship of young Brontë's college life, however, was with an enthusiastic disciple of Dr. Simeon, John Nunn, who afterwards became a clergyman. Nunn renewed his acquaintance with Patrick Brontë some years later, as we shall see. This is pretty well all we know of Mr. Brontë at Cambridge, apart from the fact that he was very successful in eking out his slender means, winning three exhibitions for poor scholars attached to St. John's. He was thus able not only to support himself, but to astonish his relatives in County Down with remittances—a duty that he fulfilled all his days.

Mr. Brontë's first curacy was at Wethersfield in Essex, where his name is to be found in the church

books in October, 1806. His vicar was Dr. Jowett —a non-resident—who published a volume of *Village Sermons*. The curate had, of course, all the parish work in his hands. He lodged at the house of an elderly maiden lady, Miss Mildred Davy, and this doubtless gave Patrick Brontë his introduction to the more lively home of Miss Davy's widowed sister, Mrs. Burder. Mrs. Burder was the mother of four children, of whom the eldest daughter, Mary, was at the time eighteen years of age, and the courtship of Irish curate and Essex lass was a matter of course. A stern uncle, watching over his niece's heritage, interrupted the correspondence; there was much heart-break, doubtless many tears, and finally Mr. Brontë took flight from Wethersfield.[1] Mary Burder waited long for intercepted letters that never came, and she was still unwed when her old lover became a widower in 1821. She then received by letter a further offer of marriage from Mr. Brontë, to which she answered "No," and thus denied to the Brontë children a kind stepmother. Three years later Mary

[1] *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, by Augustine Birrell, 1887.

Burder became Mrs. Silree, the wife of a Nonconformist minister of Wethersfield.

But this is to anticipate. At present we are only concerned with a, for the moment, heartbroken young curate who, anxious to escape from unpleasant conditions, has communicated with that old college friend, John Nunn. Mr. Nunn held a curacy at Shrewsbury at this time. From him Mr. Brontë learnt that there was a vacancy at Wellington, not far away. Of this parish John Eyton, the famous antiquarian, was Vicar. Brontë applied for and obtained the curacy, and with it renewed pleasant intercourse with his old college friend. But in a few months everything was changed. John Nunn married, and the friendship was snapped asunder. Patrick Brontë, with the remembrance of Mary Burder's apparent faithlessness still very vivid was little in the humour for comradeship with a married man. He seized the earliest opportunity for taking up parish work elsewhere, and this time his destiny took him to Yorkshire, which county was to be his home for the rest of his life. Dewsbury was his next place

of sojourn. Before we accompany him to Dewsbury, however, I may as well recall a pleasant sequel to this friendship with Mr. Nunn that belongs to fifty years later. It is related in a letter to me from Mr. Nunn's niece:—

"In 1857 I was staying with Mr. Nunn at Thorndon, in Suffolk, of which place he was rector. The good man had never read a novel in his life, and of course had never heard of the famous Brontë books. I was reading Mrs. Gaskell's *Life* with absorbed interest, and one day my uncle said, 'I have heard lately a name mentioned with which I was well familiar. What is it all about?' He was told, when he added, 'Patrick Brontë was once my greatest friend.' Next morning my uncle brought out a thick bundle of old letters and said, 'These were written by Patrick Brontë. They relate to his spiritual state. I have read them once more and now I destroy them.'"

It was in January 1809 that this Wellington episode commenced, and at the end of the same year Mr. Brontë began his long association with Yorkshire as curate of Dewsbury. Mr. Brontë always

seemed to have secured "literary" vicars, and his new vicar, Mr. Buckmaster, had some titles to fame as a hymn writer and a contributor to the magazines of the day. He was, moreover, the successor at Dewsbury to the Rev. Matthew Powley, who married the only daughter of Mary Unwin—Cowper's "Mary"—and was a regular correspondent of the poet.

At Dewsbury Mr. Brontë stayed two years, and we may well assume that his vicar's literary activities kindled some desire for a similar reputation. He wrote verses—and published them. In 1811 there was issued at Halifax a volume entitled *Cottage Poems*.[1] It contains "An Epistle to the Rev. J—— B—— while journeying for the recov-

[1] It is an interesting fact that Mr. Brontë was not the first of his own family with an inclination for writing. Dr. Douglas Hyde, the well known Gaelic scholar, has in his possession a manuscript volume in the Irish language, written by one Patrick O'Prunty in 1763. Patrick O'Prunty was, I should imagine, an elder brother of Mr. Brontë's father. The little book was called *The Adventures of the Son of the Ice Counsel*, and there is a colophon of which Dr. Douglas Hyde sends me the original and a translation; he also sends me the first quatrain of Patrick O'Prunty's poem:—

ery of his health," and there is much more of no great distinction. Patrick Brontë did not publish *Cottage Poems* until he reached his next curacy at Hartshead-cum-Clifton. A slight disagreement, the remark of a churchwarden that Mr. Buckmaster should not "keep a dog and bark himself," in other words, that the Vicar should not preach and pay a curate for preaching, excited Mr. Brontë's

Colophon to the Adventures of the Son of Ice Counsel.

Guidhim beannocht gach léightheora a n-anóir na Trionoite agas na h-óighe Muine air an sgribhneóir. Pádruig ua Pronntuidh mhic Néill, mhic Seathain, etc. April ye 20, 1763.

I pray the blessing of each reader in honour of the Trinity and of the Virgin Mary on the writer, that is Patrick O'Prunty, son of Niall, son of Seathan, etc. April ye 20, 1763.

First Quatrain of Patrick O'Prunty's poem.

Nochad millean fáilte fíor
Uaim do theachta an áirdriogh
Tháinic chugainn anois go mbuaidh
Na stiughraighthóir os cionn priomhshluagh.

Ninety millions of true welcomes
From me to the coming of the high King
Who is come to us now with victory
As a guide over the chief-hosts.

anger, for it must be admitted that the curate was quick-tempered. He promptly resigned. Mr. Buckmaster, however, assisted his irascible friend to his next appointment, one of greater security of tenure—the incumbency of Hartshead-cum-Clifton —and it was here that the young Irishman met the woman who was to become his wife—the mother of Charlotte Brontë.

CHAPTER II

THE MOTHER OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

CURATE then of Hartshead, we find Patrick Brontë at the age of thirty-four, healed, we may believe, of the wound inflicted upon his heart by a certain Essex romance and with mind bent on marriage. Here there enters upon the scene a quiet and gentle little woman from Cornwall—Maria Branwell. Miss Branwell is one of a large family, fairly prosperous, who reside in Penzance. A family vault in St. Mary's churchyard in that town records that Thomas Branwell died in 1808, and that his wife followed him to the grave in the following year. They had one son and six daughters. Mr. Branwell is described as "assistant to the corporation," whatever that official's duties may have been. He left his daughters not entirely unprovided for—I should judge with some thirty pounds a year apiece. Maria Branwell came into Yorkshire a year or two after her mother's death to

see some friends. She was in any case to make a prolonged stay with her aunt, Mrs. Fennell, her father's sister. Mr. Fennell was the Headmaster of Woodhouse Green Wesleyan Academy, where Maria Branwell's brother was a student. It was no doubt his friendship with Mr. William Morgan, the curate of the neighbouring church of Guiseley, that gave Mr. Brontë his introduction to the Fennells. Mr. Morgan was engaged to Maria Branwell's cousin, Jane Fennell. Patrick Brontë speedily lost his heart. There were a few love-letters between the engagement in August 1812 and the marriage on December 29th of that year, when at Guiseley Church Maria Branwell became Mrs. Brontë. There was a touch of romance in the very wedding. A sister and a cousin of Mrs. Brontë were married on the same day, the sister Charlotte Branwell in far away Penzance to her cousin Joseph Branwell, and Jane Fennell to Mr. Morgan. Mr. Morgan performed the marriage ceremony for Mr. and Mrs. Brontë, and Mr. Brontë in return officiated a few moments later to make his wife's cousin Mrs. Morgan.

It was stated by a niece who died a year or two ago that all three marriages were "profoundly happy."[1] There is no room to doubt this, although much ill-natured myth has gathered round Mr. Brontë as a husband. But there is no disguising the pathos of his wife's destiny. For her there were eight years of married life in the cold, bleak surroundings of Hartshead and Thornton, the giving birth to six successive children, and then, all too quickly, death in the gaunt, comfortless rectory at Haworth.

It has been said that Mrs. Gaskell exaggerated the tragedy of Charlotte Brontë's life, but not the most cheery optimist can find much sunshine in the married life of her poor mother. Mr. Brontë may have been a good husband. On the whole, he was doubtless thoroughly kind and considerate. But the best of men are prone to blindness in the face of a gentle, lonely woman's needs, and one suspects that the money spent in publishing his own well-nigh worthless verses had better have been given

[1] Letter to the author from the late Miss Branwell, of Penzance.

to his wife. But we may be sure that such a thought never entered her head. The pathos of Mrs. Brontë's brief married life is heightened by the love-letters that the world has been privileged to read. Maria Branwell at Wood House Grove exchanged letters with Patrick Brontë at Hartshead. Patrick's letters have not been preserved. Maria's were read long years afterwards by her daughter Charlotte, who remarked concerning them:—

"A few days since a little incident happened which curiously touched me. Papa put into my hands a little packet of letters and papers, telling me that they were mamma's, and that I might read them. I did read them in a frame of mind I cannot describe. The papers were yellow with time, all having been written before I was born; it was strange now to peruse, for the first time, the records of a mind whence my own sprang, and most strange, and at once sad and sweet, to find that mind of a truly fine, pure, and elevated order. They were written to papa before they were married. There is a rectitude, a refinement, a con-

stancy, a modesty, a sense, a gentleness in them indescribable. I wish that she had lived and that I had known her." [1]

The letters of Mrs. Brontë well deserve her daughter's eulogy. They are beautiful letters, these love-letters of ninety years since, with their hopes of the future, their devotion, their playful affection. "My dear saucy Pat" is the opening line of one letter, which indeed continues with the question, "What will you say when you get a real right down scolding?" If ever a man secured the love of a good woman, one feels that Mr. Brontë was thus fortunate. But, as I have said, the sequel is not rose-coloured. There came a constant succession of little children, and then the mother's death a few months after the birth of the last child, Anne.

Mr. Brontë was five years at Hartshead-cum-Clifton, and here two children were born to him, the first being named Maria and the second Elizabeth. During this period Mr. Brontë became an industrious author.

He published in Halifax, as has already been

[1] Letter to Ellen Nussey.

said, a little volume of verse entitled *Cottage Poems* in 1811, and in 1813, about the time when his first child was born, yet another volume, called *The Rural Minstrel.* This did not conclude his literary activity during his first five years at Hartshead, for a tiny prose volume, called *The Cottage in the Wood*, was also issued by him in Halifax before he went to Thornton.

During his married life at Hartshead Mr. Brontë lived in a house at the top of Clough Lane, Hightown. Then a friend, one Mr. Atkinson, offered to exchange the living of Thornton for that of Hartshead, and the exchange was effected. Mr. Atkinson is of interest to us as the godfather of Charlotte Brontë. His wife was also her godmother. She was a Miss Walter, of Lascelles Hall, near Huddersfield, and it was to be near this lady that the young curate exchanged with Mr. Brontë. Mr. Atkinson remained in possession of the perpetual curacy at Hartshead until 1866, and he lived there until 1870. Both he and his wife were very kind to Mr. Brontë's children, we are told.

CHAPTER III

THORNTON

THORNTON is even to-day a small, as it is also a very ugly, village. It is some three miles from Bradford in Yorkshire. We may assume that Mr. Atkinson, in exchanging livings, sacrificed something of material good in his desire to be near his future wife, with whom he acquired a competency. Mr. Brontë also may have been influenced less by monetary considerations than by the nearness of Mr. Morgan, who, it will be remembered, was married to his wife's cousin, and who about this time became Vicar of Christ Church, Bradford. The house to which the young mother removed in May 1815, with her two little children—one a babe of three months old—still stands. It is a plain, unpicturesque structure, rendered more plain and unpicturesque by the fact that half of its frontage has been converted into a butcher's shop.

Near by there stands a new church, in the registers of which are recorded the baptisms of the famous Brontë children.

Opposite the then "parsonage," if so mean a house could ever have been dignified by such a name, may be seen the ruin of the Old Bell Chapel, where Mr. Brontë preached and where five of his children were baptized. A baptism of one of them indeed marks the early months of Mr. Brontë's sojourn in Thornton. Elizabeth, who had been born in Hartshead in the previous May, was christened here in August. Mr. Fennell officiated, and a local magnate, Mr. Firth, and his daughter were godfather and godmother, while the second godmother was Miss Elizabeth Branwell, who had come from Penzance on her first visit to her married sister, staying fully a year at Thornton.

That Old Bell Chapel, built as a chapel-of-ease to Bradford Parish Church, as was also Haworth Church, six miles away, was to have still more notable christenings. For Charlotte and Emily Brontë were both born in this unpretentious cot-

Photo J. J. Stead

Charlotte Brontë's Birthplace

Thornton, Yorkshire, where Mr. Brontë was curate from 1816 to 1820

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tage in Thornton—Charlotte on April 21, 1816, and Emily Jane on July 30, 1818. The only boy, who was christened Patrick Branwell, was born here on June 26, 1817. Finally, the sixth and last child put in an appearance. This was Anne, who was born January 17, 1820, very shortly before her parents removed to Haworth.

Of the life of Mr. Brontë during those five years at Thornton little is recorded. We know indeed that he still wrote verses and prose stories of a kind, and that he contributed a sermon on "Conversion" to the *Pastoral Visitor*. He had his modest share of recognition from the critics then and later. His friend Mr. Morgan described *The Cottage in the Wood* in the *Pastoral Visitor* as "a very amusing and instructive tale," and so late as 1845, just before his daughters had made him famous, one Newsam, in his *Poets of Yorkshire*, devoted no less than five lines of appreciation (with eighteen lines of quotation) to Mr. Brontë as a poet.[1] Mr. Brontë's work was, however, medio-

[1] "The Poets of Yorkshire, comprising sketches and the Lives and Specimens of the writing of those 'Children of Song'

cre, and would long since have been forgotten were it not for his daughter's fame. It is more pleasant to meet him in Thornton as a social rather than as a literary luminary, and, although our knowledge of him is scanty in this respect, it is interesting as far as it goes. One Miss Elizabeth Firth, who was in 1824 to become the wife of the Rev. James Franks, Vicar of Huddersfield, was eighteen years of age when, in 1815, the Rev. Patrick Brontë removed from Hartshead to Thornton. She was living with her father at Kipping House, Thornton. She had been, by the way, a pupil of Miss Richmal Mangnall, the author of the once famous *Mangnall's Questions*. That lady was for many years a schoolmistress in the neighbourhood of Wakefield. Miss Firth made speedy acquaintance with Mrs. Brontë, and, as we have seen, became one of the child Elizabeth's godmothers.

Miss Firth kept a diary, a diary all too scanty.

who have been natives of, or otherwise connected with, the county of York. Commenced by the late William Cartwright Newsam, completed and published for the benefit of his family by John Holland." Price 5*s*. 250 copies printed. London: Groombridge & Sons. Sheffield: Ridge & Jackson. 1845.

It consisted the merest notes in a pocket-book. "We drank tea at Mr. Brontë's," is one day's item, and "Mr. Brontë and Mrs. Morgan drank tea here," is another; and so on through the five years. Mr. Brontë is seen as a most sociable individual, and constant records of tea-drinking are noted. On July 26, 1816, we learn that "Miss Branwell returned to Penzance," so that we know from this and from no other source that she was in attendance on the young mother when Charlotte was born. From one entry we learn that Miss Firth had a mind of her own in literature. "Read *Old Mortality*. Didn't like it," she says in her diary. But she is kinder to some of Sir Walter Scott's later books.

It is to Miss Firth alone that we are indebted for the actual dates of birth of all the Brontë children. On January 17, 1820, we find the announcement of another accession to the Brontë family. This was the day that Anne was born. In that month also is the record, "Gave at Anne's christening, one pound." Altogether, one sighs over the fact that Mistress Elizabeth Firth was not a

more voluble person. One real glimpse of Mrs. Brontë as she impressed a sister woman, one vivid picture of these years relative to the birth of Charlotte or Emily, one saying of the poor mother pitilessly hurrying to her doom, would have been pathetically interesting. Two months after Anne's birth we find the entry, "Mr. and Mrs. Brontë came to dinner," and so it seems that both husband and wife had their share of social life in those days, to say nothing of the companionship of the sister from Penzance.

* * * * * *

Let me explain here that Mr. Brontë as incumbent of Thornton was called "minister." Thomas Atkinson, who preceded Mr. Brontë, was "minister," and so also was William Bishop, who succeeded him in 1820. Richard Henry Heap, who came to Thornton in 1855, was the first "vicar," the title that now obtains.

It may be added that Thornton has a history quite apart from the Brontës. With all its external sordidness, it has had a wide-reaching spiritual

activity. Here, a century before Mr. Brontë's arrival had flourished eminent divines of Nonconformity, whose ashes rest amid the ruins of the Old Bell Chapel. There, most notable of all, were Joseph Lister and his son Accepted, whose name savours so well of the older puritanism. Joseph Lister, indeed, in his *Autobiography,* a book that has had much fame in its day, explains the curious name of young "Accepted." His wife was in great spiritual depression when the child was born. This depression, we are told, was lifted almost immediately, and then, as Lister says in the quaint language of his age:—

". . . the Lord was pleased to shine in upon her soul again, to her great satisfaction, and she was filled with peace and joy through believing; in consideration of which we resolved to give him this name; and God hath made him acceptable to many souls, though it pleased the Lord to afflict him with a great weakness in his joints . . . "

Mr. Brontë came, then, into an evangelical tradition, and his wife's uncle, Mr. Fennell, who about this time abandoned Wesleyanism and be-

came a clergyman of the Church of England, helped to keep him in toleration for all aspects of the evangelical creed. Apparently he never quarrelled with Nonconformity, although at a much later date some of his curates at Haworth did. Vigorous hatred of the tenets of the Church of Rome he had imbibed from his North of Ireland environment, and that sentiment was part of the inheritance of his brilliant children, notably of his daughter Charlotte.

CHAPTER IV

CHILDHOOD AT HAWORTH

CHARLOTTE BRONTË was a little girl of six years of age when her father exchanged Thornton for Haworth. We have no glimpse of her at Thornton; we have little enough glimpse of the child and her brother and sisters in the first years at Haworth. When Mrs. Gaskell wrote, there were people who well remembered the departure of Mr. Brontë and his family—the carts laden with the minister's furniture, the delicate mother and her six little children, the eldest, Maria, only seven years of age. The change, if change were helpful, was all to that mother's advantage. The house was much better situated, at a healthier altitude, and pleasantly jutting on the glorious moors. Given genuine health, Mrs. Brontë could have been happy enough at Haworth—happier than at Thornton. But physical health she had not, nor

did her children inherit it from her, and therein lay more than half the tragedy of their lives, and the all too early death of every one of them.

Mrs. Brontë's stay in that moorland home was not a long one. She and her family arrived at the vicarage somewhere in April 1820. Mr. Brontë, it is true, took the Haworth services from February, but it is clear that he left his family behind him then as the guests of the Firths, at Kipping House. As a stalwart walker, the journey to and fro could never have troubled him. His visits to Thornton continue to be recorded in Miss Firth's diary many times during this year 1820. In September of that year, after less than six months of life in Haworth, Mrs. Brontë died. If we are to believe gossip, the bereaved husband tried in two quarters to find a stepmother for his little children. He first applied to Mary Burder, of Wethersfield, as we have seen, and then to Elizabeth Firth, of Thornton. Twice refused, he turned to his wife's sister, Elizabeth Branwell, of Penzance, and asked her to come and be housekeeper and in a manner a mother to his little ones. The duties

were accepted and faithfully performed for twenty-two years.

Returning for a moment to Mrs. Brontë, we find her life story to be a brief and unquestionably a pathetic one. She is preserved for us in her daughter's biography by a number of love-letters and by a brief religious essay of no particular individuality.[1] Mr. Brontë was deeply attached to his wife, and there is no reason to accept for a moment the various foolish stories of his treatment of her in those later days of her life. The value of the scandalous Haworth stories that have stuck to Mr. Brontë, although Mrs. Gaskell was compelled to withdraw them from later editions of her *Life*, may be gauged from the fact that Mr. Brontë had only, as we have seen, six months of married life at Haworth, while at Thornton he was in every way inclined to sociability. Some measure of moroseness may, however, have come over Mr. Brontë in the period following his bereavement. Taking him-

[1] The love-letters are in the possession of Mr. A. B. Nicholls. The manuscript entitled "The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns" is in my library.

self and his work seriously, he did not care to let that work be interrupted too much by his children. They therefore pursued their studies and partook of their meals very much under their aunt's guidance, their father frequently having his meals alone. They met in his study—the parlour—on the right-hand side of the doorway as you enter the house, for tea, but they saw little of him during the rest of the day.

We may imagine, then, these six children working the samplers that remain to us, at their aunt's knee, reading such little books as came into their hands—books, we may be sure, too "old" for the little people. They had the usual experiences of orphan children, much grim kindness from aunt and servants. The servants of that time, Sarah and Nancy Garrs, were asked for their impressions in later life, and then at least they were enthusiastic. Never was so kind a master as Mr. Brontë, never so clever a little child as Charlotte. We may accept such testimony with a grain of salt, but the main fact remains that it was a reasonably happy home until the educational problem asserted

itself. Education has always special credentials for the self-made man, and Mr. Brontë not unnaturally availed himself of the Clergy Daughters' School at Casterton, where a good subsidized education was provided at fourteen pounds a year. Maria, the eldest girl, entered the school on July 1, 1824, and Elizabeth, aged nine, on the same day. Charlotte entered on August 10, 1824, and Emily November 25 of that year, the former being eight years old and the latter less than six. The school brought no happiness to the four delicate, anaemic children. No boarding school of that epoch would have done so. Such places are only possible for the physically robust. But there is not much need to associate too closely the sad fate of Maria and Elizabeth Brontë—both of whom left the school in 1825 to die—with the actual defects of the cheap boarding school system of the period. Maria left in February, and died in May; Elizabeth left in May, and died on June 15. On June 1 Charlotte and Emily returned to Haworth. Charlotte Brontë long years afterwards was to gibbet for all

time the worst aspects of our inferior girls' schools in "Lowood," of *Jane Eyre,* as Dickens, a little later, was to gibbet the inferior boys' schools in "Dotheboys Hall" of *Nicholas Nickleby.* After Miss Brontë's death her biographer, Mrs. Gaskell, got into trouble for her identification of the Lowood of *Jane Eyre* with the Casterton presided over by the Rev. Carus Wilson. A very considerable mass of opinion was brought together from old pupils to prove that, even when the little Brontës were there, Casterton was a most exemplary institution. The point is scarcely worth disputing over now. Much more depends upon health in early childhood than at any other time. Food that to one child is a torture to eat, to another provides a real gratification of appetite; an environment that to one child is hell, to another is paradise. The little Brontë girls had fragile constitutions and therein, it cannot be too often repeated, lay the whole tragedy of their lives.

There was little of tragedy, but much of happiness, however, in the years immediately following their leaving Casterton and the death of the two

The Old Parsonage, Haworth

As it stood at the time that the Brontë Family occupied it (1820–1861) and before its enlargement

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elder sisters. Miss Branwell was doubtless a very prim personage, although kindly withal. There is no reason to suppose but that she did her best for the four orphaned children, of whom Charlotte, the eldest, was nine years of age when she left Cowan Bridge, and fourteen when she entered Roe Head School. Those five years were, as I have said, fairly happy. There is a copy of *The Imitation of Christ* extant, given to Charlotte in 1826, and there are other books that we know the children read during this period, including Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather*. They also commenced to write "original compositions," as so many children of precocious tendencies do—to the joy of fond and ambitious parents. But I am not sure that children often cultivate the minute handwriting that was affected by the Brontë prodigies. There are perhaps a hundred little manuscript books in existence, principally the work of Charlotte and Branwell, some few, however, by Emily and Anne. They were compiled in a microscopic handwriting probably from reasons of economy. Pence, we may be sure, were scarce with the

little ones. The booklets were stitched and covered, sugar-paper being in most cases used for the wrappers. It is not possible to trace any particular talent in these little books, many of which bear the date 1829. Assuredly hundreds of children who have never come to fame have written quite as well. It was noteworthy, however, that the little Brontës had their heroes, who were also the heroes of the hour. They took the victorious Duke of Wellington to their hearts, and also the duke's sons, the Marquis of Douro and Lord Charles Wellesley, who figure largely in their tiny pages. It was a life of dreams, of a kind that children delight in, that indeed makes the life of childhood ever alternately beautiful and terrible. On the wild moors behind the house there must have been in any case much supreme happiness for the little Brontës in those early years that preceded the real schooldays now opening to them.

CHAPTER V

SCHOOLDAYS. 1831—1835.

In January 1831, Charlotte Brontë became a pupil at Roe Head, Dewsbury. The headmistress was a Miss Margaret Wooler, who survived her famous pupil by many long years, dying in 1885. There were never more than ten pupils during the year and a half that Charlotte was at school, but among them were two to whom we owe all of most interest concerning Miss Brontë in the years before fame came to her. These fellow pupils were Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor, each of them fourteen years of age, that is to say, a year younger than their friend. Of both Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey Miss Brontë has left vivid descriptions, full of insight and characterization that time was to verify. Miss Taylor was business-like, matter-of-fact, "intellectual"; Miss Nussey was simply pretty and lovable, but hero-worshipping to an al-

most morbid degree. Both girls had to undergo great vicissitudes of fortune, their families falling on evil days in later years, but Miss Taylor was to have the wider experience, and the larger outlook upon life. She went to New Zealand to "set up shop," as she expressed it, only returning to England when she had secured a competency.[1] Miss Nussey lived to a good old age in the district where her childhood had been passed. From 1857, when she gave Mrs. Gaskell material assistance in her *Life*, until her death in 1897, she was always accessible to the admirers of Charlotte Brontë, and she carefully preserved the voluminous correspondence of her friend, most of which has been published.[2] It is to Ellen Nussey that we owe all the best glimpses of Charlotte Brontë as

[1] Miss Mary Taylor wrote two books, *Miss Miles, a Tale of Yorkshire Life*, and *The First Duty of Woman*. The last thirty years of her life were spent at Gomersal, near her early home. Here she died in 1893. Miss Taylor refused to say anything about Charlotte Brontë during the twenty later years of her life and she destroyed all her friend's letters.

[2] In Mrs. Gaskell's *Life*, Sir Wemyss Reid's *Monograph*, and in *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*. There were over five hundred letters in all.

she grows to womanhood; it is to Mary Taylor, however, that we owe the first impression of her in these years at Roe Head:—

"I first saw her coming out of a covered cart, in very old-fashioned clothes, and looking very cold and miserable. She was coming to school at Miss Wooler's. When she appeared in the schoolroom her dress was changed, but just as old. She looked a little old woman, so shortsighted that she always appeared to be seeking something, and moving her head from side to side to catch a sight of it. She was very shy and nervous, and spoke with a strong Irish accent. When a book was given to her she dropped her head over it till her nose nearly touched it, and when she was told to hold her head up, up went the book after it, still close to her nose, so that it was not possible to help laughing." [1]

Mary Taylor goes on to describe the growth of her friendship with Miss Brontë, the keen political arguments that took place—for they were at school together in the year of the great Reform Bill.

[1] From a letter written by Mary Taylor from New Zealand to Mrs. Gaskell.

This was really a very happy time in Charlotte Brontë's life. She was devoted to her two friends, kindly disposed to the rest of her schoolfellows, and attached to Miss Wooler. The school was small enough for her nervous, shy temperament not to give her much concern, her holidays were passed at her friends' homes in the neighbourhood, her childhood's griefs, the loss of her elder sisters, were too remote, and there was at this time no premonition of trouble to come. She loved painting and drawing, and there are very many specimens of her work extant that are of this period. They are not, however, of great merit. It was as an artist in words that Charlotte Brontë was to excel. To Roe Head also she owed a fair knowledge of French, as a translation by her of the first book of Voltaire's *Henriade*[1] indicates. With French as a spoken language she was to become acquainted by-and-by, as we shall see. Suffice to say that she went back to Haworth and to her family circle with a fairly presentable equipment for a girl of sixteen who had to "coach" her

[1] In the possession of the present writer.

younger sisters and assist in many ways to make the vicar's slender stipend go as far as possible.

In the middle of 1832, then, Charlotte Brontë returned to Haworth, and her life there is best presented in an extract from a letter to Ellen Nussey:—

"You ask me to give you a description of the manner in which I have passed every day since I left school. This is soon done, as an account of one day is an account of all. In the mornings from nine o'clock to half-past twelve I instruct my sisters and draw, then we walk till dinner; after dinner I sew till tea-time, and after tea I either read, write, do a little fancy-work, or draw, as I please. Thus in one delightful, though monotonous course, my life is passed. I have only been out to tea twice since I came home. We are expecting company this afternoon, and on Tuesday next we shall have all the female teachers of the Sunday school to tea."

This letter was written in 1832, and so three years were allowed to pass, their only tangible records for us to-day being certain drawings that bear

the dates of this period, and certain little manuscripts not greatly superior to those of the earlier childhood years, and giving no promise whatever of the literary success that was ultimately to come. The manuscripts of these later years were mainly written in verse form.

In 1835 Mr. Brontë and his family apparently held a committee of ways and means. The children were growing up, and a grown-up family of three girls and one boy could not be expected permanently to occupy the not very commodious parsonage. Branwell, moreover, was to be an artist, which involved expense. He was to go to London to study at the Royal Academy Schools, and his sisters realized that they also should think of some occupation, and thus relieve the family exchequer. Charlotte's turn came first. In July 1835 she returned to Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head as a governess, the warm friendship that she had ever felt for her old schoolmistress justifying the supposition that here would be the career with the least possible chance of failure.

CHAPTER VI

GOVERNESS LIFE

CHARLOTTE returned to Roe Head as a governess in July 1835, and she was accompanied by her sister Emily, who entered the school as a pupil. She writes as follows concerning her plans, to her friend Miss Nussey:—

"I had hoped to have had the extreme pleasure of seeing you at Haworth this summer, but human affairs are mutable and human resolutions must bend to the course of events. We are all about to divide, break up, separate. Emily is going to school, Branwell is going to London, and I am going to be a governess. This last determination I formed myself, knowing I should have to take the step sometime, and 'better sune as syne' to use the Scotch proverb; and knowing well that papa would have enough to do with his limited income should Branwell be placed at the Royal Academy and Emily at Roe Head. Where am I going to reside?

you will ask. Within four miles of yourself, dearest, at a place neither of us are unacquainted with, being no other than the identical Roe Head mentioned above. Yes, I am going to teach in the very school where I was myself taught. Miss Wooler made me the offer, and I preferred it to one or two proposals of private governess-ship, which I had before received. I am sad, very sad, at the thought of leaving home, but duty, necessity, these are stern mistresses who will not be disobeyed. Did I not once say, Ellen, you ought to be thankful for your independence? I felt what I said at the time, and I repeat it now with double earnestness; if anything would cheer me, it is the idea of being so near you. Surely you and Polly will come and see me; it would be wrong in me to doubt it; you were never unkind yet. Emily and I leave home on the 29th of this month; the idea of being together consoles us both somewhat, and in truth, since I must enter a situation, 'my lines have fallen in pleasant places.' I both love and respect Miss Wooler. What did you mean, Ellen, by saying that you knew the reason why I wished to have a letter from

Haworth Old Church

The tower alone remains. The church was pulled down in the year 1879 and rebuilt. Every member of the Brontë family was buried here save only Anne, who was buried at Scarborough

your sister Mercy? The sentence hurt me, though I did not quite understand it. My only reason was a desire to correspond with a person I have a regard for. Give my love both to her and to S., and Miss Nussey."

Charlotte Brontë's governess period is however the least pleasant to survey of any aspect of her life. She was ill adapted for the position of looking after a miscellaneous crowd of girls. She hated the work, and she had a bitter tongue when facing all the petty discomforts of such a position. Still less was she suited for her after-position of a nursery governess. Great animal spirits, immense self-confidence, all the qualities that made this ever arduous career possible although rarely pleasant, were utterly lacking to this shy retiring woman.

Charlotte Brontë was little more than nineteen years of age when she went to Roe Head as governess. The year following Miss Wooler removed her school to Dewsbury. This was just before the Christmas of 1836. Charlotte was but a year at this latter place when she returned home, broken in health and spirits.

Emily, now aged seventeen, went with her sister as we have stated. After three months, however, she utterly broke down with this constant contact with strangers, and went back to Haworth, Anne taking her place in the school as a pupil.

There is nothing to add to what has already been printed again and again concerning this period. What we know of it we owe to her two friends, Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor. With both she corresponded regularly, and her Sundays were frequently spent at the house of one or the other.

Ellen Nussey had her home at this time and until 1837 at The Rydings, near Birstall, a beautiful house in its own grounds which young Branwell Brontë described when he visited it as "paradise." It doubtless meant something in her development that at an impressionable age Charlotte should have been introduced occasionally to a prosperous, and even luxurious environment. She loved Ellen Nussey, moreover, although she had no common ground of intellectual interest. Her letters to her are frequent, and they are always affectionate. But she has herself well described the

limitations of the friendship in a letter to a later friend:—

"True friendship is no gourd, springing up in a night and withering in a day. When I first saw Ellen I did not care for her; we were schoolfellows. In course of time we learnt each other's faults and good points. We were contrasts—still, we suited. Affection was first a germ, then a sapling, then a strong tree—now, no new friend, however lofty or profound in intellect, not even Miss Martineau herself—could be to me what Ellen is; yet she is no more than a conscientious, observant, calm, well-bred Yorkshire girl. She is without romance. If she attempts to read poetry, or poetic prose, aloud, I am irritated and deprive her of the book; if she talks of it, I stop my ears; but she is good; she is true; she is faithful, and I love her." [1]

Of more importance however in Miss Brontë's intellectual growth was her friendship with Mary Taylor, the "dear Polly" and "dear Pag" of many a letter unhappily destroyed. One would

[1] Letter to W. S. Williams in *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle*, page 205.

gladly have possessed a clearer picture than exists of that other home into which Charlotte was welcomed in these dreary, governess days. The Taylors are, however, well depicted in the Yorkes, of *Shirley*. It was a pleasant house, this at Gomersal, and it may still be seen from the road from which it is separated by a high brick wall. Here Mr. Taylor's family dwelt for many years, and when the young governess entered the circle we may be sure that argument waxed fast and furious. For Charlotte Brontë was " Church " to the backbone, and " State " as understood by the followers of Wellington equally to the backbone, while the Taylor family were Dissenters and Democrats. From those days onward it is clear that a larger religious toleration, a larger human sympathy than she had hitherto known gathered in Charlotte Brontë's mind, and Mary Taylor must have been mainly instrumental in giving her this. " Mary alone," she says in one of her letters, " has more energy and power in her nature than any ten men you can pick out in the united parishes of Birstall and Haworth." Or we may take this other picture where

she is presented as Rose Yorke in *Shirley*:—"Rose is a still, and sometimes a stubborn girl now; her mother wants to make of her such a woman as she is herself—a woman of dark and dreary duties; and Rose has a mind full-set, thick-sown, with the germs of ideas her mother never knew. It is agony to her often to have these ideas trampled on and repressed. She has never rebelled yet; but if hard driven, she will rebel one day, and then it will be once for all."

The Christmas holidays of 1836 were spent at home, at Haworth, and even then some kind of literary aspirations must have begun with the young people, for we find Charlotte corresponding with Southey, then Poet Laureate. We find Branwell Brontë also writing letters to the Editor of *Blackwood's Magazine* begging for the insertion of his contributions, and sending to Wordsworth drafts of his projected books. When the Christmas holidays were over Charlotte returned to the inevitable "grind," as she called it, not this time to Roe Head but to the new school-house at Dewsbury Moor. In March of 1837 she obtained a long-

delayed answer from Southey—a kind and considerate letter from a busy man to a stranger—advising that she should not think about literature. A fragment of her reply is worth printing:—

"My father is a clergyman of limited though competent income, and I am the eldest of his children. He expended quite as much in my education as he could afford in justice to the rest. I thought it therefore my duty, when I left school, to become a governess. In that capacity I find enough to occupy my thoughts all day long, and my head and hands too, without having a moment's time for one dream of the imagination. In the evenings, I confess, I do think, but I never trouble any one else with my thoughts. I carefully avoid any appearance of preoccupation and eccentricity, which might lead those I live amongst to suspect the nature of my pursuits. Following my father's advice—who from my childhood has counselled me, just in the wise and friendly tone of your letter—I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always suc-

ceed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself; and my father's approbation amply rewarded me for the privation. Once more allow me to thank you with sincere gratitude. I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print; if the wish should rise, I'll look at Southey's letter, and suppress it." [1]

At the end of 1837, as the Christmas holidays were coming on, Charlotte had a "breeze" with Miss Wooler concerning her sister Anne, who was still a pupil at the school. Robust in health herself, Miss Wooler perhaps took little account of the ailments of others. Anne had what to the schoolmistress was merely a slight cold; to her devoted sister it was much more, and Charlotte was right; it was doubtless the beginning of that consumption which was all too soon to end her sister's life. The alienation was but temporary, and Miss Wooler and her pupil parted the best of friends. Charlotte and Anne went home, and the latter did

[1] See Southey's *Life*, vol. vi. pp. 329–30, for two letters from Southey to Charlotte Brontë.

not again return to Dewsbury. The three sisters were together for a time. Charlotte returned alone to Dewsbury after the Christmas holidays, but at the beginning of June, 1838, she went back to Haworth, "a shattered wreck," as she described herself in a letter to one of her friends.

It was but a few months after this, while still at home at Haworth, she received her first offer of marriage—from a clergyman, Henry Nussey, the brother of her friend Ellen. He was at this time Curate of Donnington in Sussex; he afterwards became Rector of Hathersage in Derbyshire, and here Charlotte Brontë spent a memorable three weeks' holiday with Ellen Nussey some time later, with the result that she was able to introduce an element of Derbyshire scenery into her books.[1] Charlotte Brontë went to stay at Hathersage with her friend Ellen while the vicar was on his honeymoon, for it did not take him long to recover from the blow of Miss Brontë's rejection of his suit. He had indeed told her frankly enough that he

[1] In Hathersage Church is an altar tomb to Robert Eyre, who fought at Agincourt, and to his wife, Joan Eyre. Hathersage is of course the village of Morton of *Jane Eyre*.

wanted some one to look after his housekeeping, and Charlotte had sufficient romance in her composition to feel that this was not quite an adequate courtship. That she had her own strong views on the subject is shown by a letter which I print here, written soon afterwards to a friend whose love-affair also came to nothing. It is dated November 20, 1840.

" That last letter of thine treated of matters so high and important I cannot delay answering it for a day. Now, Ellen, I am about to write thee a discourse and a piece of advice which thou must take as if it came from thy grandmother, but in the first place, before I begin with thee, I have a word to whisper in the ear of Mr. Lincoln, and I wish it could reach him.

" In the name of St. Chrysostom, St. Simeon and St. Jude, why does not that amiable young gentleman come forward like a man and say all he has to say to yourself personally, instead of trifling with kinsmen and kinswomen? Mr. Lincoln, I say, walk or ride over to Brookny some fine morning, where you will find Miss Ellen sitting in the draw-

ing room making a little white frock for the Jew's basket, and say, 'Miss Ellen, I want to speak to you.' Miss Ellen will of course civilly answer, 'I'm at your service, Mr. Lincoln,' and then when the room is cleared of all but *yourself and herself*, just take a chair near her, insist upon her laying down that silly Jew basket work, and listening to *you*, then begin in a clear, distinct, deferential but determined voice—'Miss Ellen, I have a question to put to you, a very important question—will you take me as your husband, for better, for worse? I am not a rich man, but I have sufficient to support us, I am not a great man, but I love you honestly and truly. Miss Ellen, if you knew the world better you would see that this is an offer not to be despised—a kind attached heart, and a moderate competency.' Do this, Mr. Lincoln, and you may succeed; go on writing sentimental and love-sick letters to Henry, and I would not give sixpence for your suit.

"So much for Mr. Lincoln. Now, Ellen, your turn comes to swallow the black bolus—called a friendly advice. Here I am under difficulties, be-

cause I don't know Mr. Lincoln; if I did I would give you my opinion roundly in two words. Is the man a fool? Is he a knave or humbug, a hypocrite, a ninny, a noodle? If he is any or all of these things of course there is no sense in trifling with him—cut him short at once, blast his hopes with lightning rapidity and keenness.

"Is he something better than this? Has he at least common sense, a good disposition, a manageable temper? Then, Ellen, consider the matter. You feel a disgust towards him now, an utter repugnance, very likely, but be so good as to remember you don't know him, you have only had three or four days' acquaintance with him; longer and closer intimacy might reconcile you to a wonderful extent. And now I'll tell you a word of truth at which you may be offended or not as you like. From what I know of your character, and I think I know it pretty well, I should say you will *never love before marriage.* After that ceremony is over, and after you have had some months to settle down, and to get accustomed to the creature you have taken for your worse half, you will probably

make a most affectionate and happy wife, even if the individual should not prove all you could wish, you will be indulgent towards his little foibles and will not feel much annoyance at them. This will especially be the case if he should have sense sufficient to allow you to guide him in important matters. Such being the case, Ellen, I hope you will not have the romantic folly to wait for the wakening of what the French call '*Une Grande Passion.*' My good girl, 'Une grande passion' is 'une grande Folie.' I have told you so before, and I tell it you again. Moderation in all things is wisdom. When you are as old as I am (I am sixty at least, being your grandmother) you will find that the majority of those worldly precepts, whose seeming coldness shocks and repels us in youth, are founded in wisdom. Did you not once say to me in all childlike simplicity, 'I thought, Charlotte, no young ladies should fall in love till the offer was actually made?' I forget what answer I made at the time, but I now reply after due consideration, 'Right as a glove, the maxim is just, and I hope you will always attend to it.' I will even extend

and confirm it—no young lady should fall in love till the offer has been made, accepted, the marriage ceremony performed, and the first half-year of wedded life has passed away; a woman may then begin to love, but with very great precaution, very coolly, very moderately, very rationally. If she ever loves so much that a harsh word or a cold look from her husband cuts her to the heart, she is a fool—if she ever loves so much that her husband's will is her law, and that she has got into a habit of watching his look in order that she may anticipate his wishes, she will soon be a neglected fool. Did I not once tell you of an instance of a relative of mine who cared for a young lady until he began to suspect that she cared more for him and then instantly conceived a sort of contempt for her? You know to whom I allude—never as you value your ears mention the circumstance—but I have two studies, *you* are my study for the success, the credit, and the respectability of a quiet tranquil character. Mary is my study—for the contempt, the remorse, the misconstruction which follow the development of feelings in themselves noble, warm,

generous, devoted and profound, but which being too freely revealed, too frankly bestowed, are not estimated at their real value. God bless her, I never hope to see in this world a character more truly noble—she would *die* willingly for one she loved, her intellect and her attainments are of the highest standard. Yet I doubt whether Mary will ever marry.

" I think I may as well conclude the letter, for after all I can give you no advice worth receiving, all I have to say may be comprised in a very brief sentence. On one hand don't accept if you are *certain* you cannot *tolerate* the man—on the other hand don't refuse because you cannot *adore* him. As to little Walter M——, I think he will not die of love of anybody—you might safely coquette with him a trifle if you were so disposed without fear of having a broken heart on your conscience. His reverence expresses himself very strongly on the subject of young ladies saying ' No ' when they mean ' Yes.' He assures me he means nothing personal. I hope not. I tried to find something admirable in him and failed.

"Assuredly I quite agree with him in his disapprobation of such a senseless course. It is folly indeed for the tongue to stammer a negative when the heart is proclaiming an affirmative. Or rather it is an act of heroic self-denial of which I for one confess myself wholly incapable. *I would not tell such a lie* to gain a thousand pounds. Write to me again soon and let me know how it all goes on." [1]

Instead of plunging into matrimony, Charlotte Brontë twice entered upon the duties of a governess in a private family. Her first "situation," as she calls it, was with a Mrs. Sidgwick, and we find her in June 1839 writing to her sister Emily from the Sidgwick family mansion at Stonegappe in Yorkshire, explaining that her life there was thoroughly hateful to her. Mr. A. C. Benson, the well-known critic and a cousin of the Sidgwicks, has epitomised the situation when he says that she clearly had no gifts for the management of children; and also that she was in a very mor-

[1] See Appendix for other letters.

bid condition the whole time she was at Stonegappe.[1]

She seems to have been happier when, after a few months at home, she took up a second situation as governess in the family of Mr. and Mrs. White at Upperwood House, Rawdon, Yorkshire, where she had only two pupils, a girl of eight and a boy of six; and where certainly the father of the family did his best now and hereafter to prove himself a friend to Miss Brontë. It was he doubtless who assisted with his advice in the scheme for going abroad, the enterprise which was the turning-point in Charlotte Brontë's career, and which undoubtedly made her the famous author she eventually became.

[1] *Life of Edward White Benson, sometime Archbishop of Canterbury*, by A. C. Benson. Mr. Benson asserts that one of the children told him that if Miss Brontë was desired to accompany them to church—"Oh, Miss Brontë, do run up and put on your things, we want to start"—she was plunged in dudgeon because she was being treated as a hireling. If, in consequence, she was not invited to accompany them, she was infinitely depressed because she was treated as an outcast and a friendless dependent.

CHAPTER VII

THE PENSION HÉGER, BRUSSELS

IT is in my judgment exceedingly probable that had not circumstances led Charlotte Brontë to spend some time in Brussels, the world would never have heard of her and of her sisters. Charlotte was nearly twenty-six years of age when she went on the Continent, and she had accomplished nothing noteworthy. She had indeed written copiously in prose and verse, but her work will not bear any critical examination. Let it be remembered that she was of an age at which Fanny Burney had already won renown with *Evelina.* At twenty-two Jane Austen had written *Pride and Prejudice,* and *Sense and Sensibility,* two supremely great novels. Before John Keats had reached these years he had written his many immortal poems, and had gone to his grave. One has only to compare with the achievement of many of her peers in literature what

Miss Brontë had accomplished up to this time, in spite of much strenuous literary ambition. Some of her earlier work has been printed, not on account of its merits, but through the rashness of hero-worship, and much of it, still in manuscript, may be examined by the curious.[1] Not the most lenient of critics can here discover the least suggestion of the genius that was to find its earliest expression in *The Professor*, the novel in which our author first attempted to woo the publishers and in which she also first described the entirely new world wherein her soul had been unbound. The sojourn in Brussels, I suggest again, made Miss Brontë an author.

It had long been the desire of the three girls to set up school on their own account in the Haworth Parsonage. Each in turn had found her work as governess a position of absolute tragedy. Anne had held two such situations, Emily one, and Charlotte, as we have seen, also two. To Emily

[1] There are MSS. in the British Museum and in the Brontë Museum, Haworth. See also *The Adventures of Ernest Alembert*, a fairy tale by Charlotte Brontë, edited by Thomas J. Wise, 1896; and *Poems by Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë, now for the first time printed*, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1902.

the thing must have been an unmitigated tragedy, and to all of them it was clearly unendurable. It was during this time that the school project was first mooted, and Charlotte wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey—

"You will not mention our school scheme at present. A project not actually commenced is always uncertain. . . . I have one aching feeling at my heart (I must allude to it, though I had resolved not to). It is about Anne; she has so much to endure: far, far more than I have. When my thoughts turn to her, they always see her as a patient, persecuted stranger. I know what concealed susceptibility is in her nature when her feelings are wounded. I wish I could be with her, to administer a little balm. She is more lonely, less gifted with the power of making friends, even than I am."

There would be more freedom in a home school, but then every one, with candid friendship, called attention to the fact that without "languages" an independent position as school-mistress was out of

the question. Some of their old school friends had been to Brussels. Two of them, Mary and Martha Taylor, were there at the time, but meanwhile there were some who strongly advised an "Institution" at Lille. Finally, however, Brussels was decided on. A little earlier, writing from her governess post at Mrs. White's, Charlotte had made an urgent appeal to the aunt to advance them some money. Miss Branwell had already promised her nieces the loan of £100 from her savings for the school project, in order that furniture might be bought, circulars printed, and so on. Why not, Charlotte asks her aunt, advance the money to help us in Brussels? "In half a year," she says, "I could acquire a thorough familiarity with French. I could improve greatly in Italian, and even get a dash of German." The end of the letter is worth quoting in full—

"I feel an absolute conviction that, if this advantage were allowed us, it would be the making of us for life. Papa will perhaps think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but who ever rose in the world without ambition? When he left Ireland to

go to Cambridge University, he was as ambitious as I am now. I want us *all* to go on. I know we have talents and I want them to be turned to account. I look to you, aunt, to help us. I think you will not refuse. I know, if you consent, it shall not be my fault if you ever repent your kindness."

Finally Miss Branwell acceded to her niece's appeal; the Maison d'Éducation of Madame Héger in the Rue d'Isabelle, Brussels, was decided on, and Charlotte and Emily went there in February, 1842, staying for two days in London on the way. Mr. Brontë accompanied his children on this expedition, giving himself his first and only visit to the Continent, while it gave his daughters their first view of London. Mr. Brontë stayed but one night in Brussels. The next morning he returned to England and to Haworth, and his daughters devoted themselves strenuously to their work.

They found themselves in a school once again, but now as pupils, not as teachers; and in a way they were fairly happy during their first six months in Brussels. There were forty day pupils, and twelve boarders. All the boarders slept in one long

room, which, with its rows of little beds, and its passage between, after the fashion of the wards of a hospital may still be seen; and indeed the place had its sprinkling of English pupils until quite recent years. There are several Englishwomen still living who were pupils of Madame Héger in the generations that followed the Brontës. The present writer has spent more than one pleasant hour in a drawing-room in Bayswater where he has heard three amiable and cultivated gentlewomen recall with full hearts their old memories of the Pensionnat Héger. They were the daughters of a Dr. Wheelwright residing in Brussels for his health. One of them, Laetitia, became very intimate with Charlotte, another and younger sister Sarah Anne, was able to remember certain music lessons when Emily was her instructor, and proved, as the child thought, not too kindly a teacher to the little girl who indeed as an adult has clearly none of the admiration for Emily that she gave to Charlotte.

There were two other English girls in Brussels at the time who have their place in this story:

Mary and Martha Taylor. The old schoolfellows of Dewsbury were not at the same school as Charlotte, but at a more expensive establishment, the Chateau de Koekelberg. Here Martha fell ill and died, and but a few weeks later Charlotte and Emily Anne were hastily summoned home by the illness of the aunt to whose generosity they owed their few months in Brussels.

Miss Branwell died on October 29, 1842. Her two nieces did not reach Haworth until the beginning of November. They found themselves monetarily the richer by their aunt's death. The three girls inherited some five hundred pounds apiece of the old lady's careful investments, not enough to enrich the household much, as the aunt's income had died with her, but sufficient to make things easier as far as the school project was concerned. Now they need not go to Bridlington, as was contemplated earlier. They might alter the parsonage a little, utilize their aunt's bedroom, and take at least two or three pupils.

But meanwhile Anne had still a "situation" that had in it many advantages. She was govern-

ess to the daughters of a clergyman—Mr. Robinson, of Thorpe Green. Why not let Emily keep house and Charlotte be allowed to spend yet another year at Brussels in order to make herself more thoroughly proficient?

M. Héger had taken the keenest interest in his pupils and had written to their father expressing regret at their hasty departure from the school. He suggested that one or both of them might wish to return in a position of perfect independence as English governess.

It was this offer that Charlotte determined to accept, and in January, 1843, she set out, this time alone, on her eventful journey, leaving Haworth on Friday morning, and reaching Brussels on Sunday evening. Here a new life began. She was now a governess—Mademoiselle Charlotte—with many special privileges, working hard in her own time at German, and conducting the English class besides superintending other classes at times. To the native governesses she found herself in antagonism—in fact, it must be admitted that Mesdames Blanche, Sophie, and Haussé, her three col-

leagues, were not merely not tolerated, but were hated very cordially. There were compensations, however. She had the Wheelwright family and a certain Mary Dixon for friends in the city. She had also at the first the good will not only of M. Héger, but of his wife. "Whenever I turn back," she writes, "to compare what I am with what I was, my place here with my place at Mrs. Sidgwick's, or Mrs. White's, I am thankful."

Then will seem to have come a change. Writing to her brother Branwell, she says—

"Among 120 persons which compose the daily population of this house, I can discern only one or two who deserve anything like regard. This is not owing to foolish fastidiousness on my part, but to the absence of decent qualities on theirs. They have not intellect or politeness or good-nature or good-feeling. They are nothing. I don't hate them—hatred would be too warm a feeling. They have no sensations themselves, and they excite none. But one wearies from day to day of caring nothing, fearing nothing, liking nothing, hating nothing, being nothing, doing nothing—yes, I

teach, and sometimes get red in the face with impatience at their stupidity. But don't think I ever scold or fly into a passion. If I spoke warmly, as warmly as I sometimes used to do at Roe Head, they would think me mad. Nobody ever gets into a passion here. Such a thing is not known. The phlegm that thickens their blood is too gluey to boil. They are very false in their relations with each other, but they rarely quarrel, and friendship is a folly they are unacquainted with. The black Swan, M. Héger, is the only sole veritable exception to this rule (for Madame, always cool and always reasoning, is not quite an exception). But I rarely speak to Monsieur now, for not being a pupil I have little or nothing to do with him. From time to time he shows his kind-heartedness by loading me with books, so that I am still indebted to him for all the pleasure or amusement I have. Except for the total want of companionship I have nothing to complain of." [1]

Still more melancholy was her condition by September when she wrote to her sister Emily the let-

[1] *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle.*

ter which told of her confession to a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, an incident so skilfully made use of in her novel *Villette*—

"Yesterday I went on a pilgrimage to the cemetery, and far beyond it on to a hill where there was nothing but fields as far as the horizon. When I came back it was evening, but I had such a repugnance to return to the house, which contained nothing that I cared for, I still kept threading the streets in the neighbourhood of the Rue d'Isabelle and avoiding it. I found myself opposite to Ste. Gudule, and the bell, whose voice you know, began to toll for evening salut. I went in, quite alone (which procedure you will say is not much like me), wandered about the aisles where a few old women were saying their prayers, till vespers began. I stayed till they were over. Still I could not leave the church or force myself to go home—to school, I mean. An odd whim came into my head. In a solitary part of the cathedral six or seven people still remained kneeling by the confessionals. In two confessionals I saw a priest. I felt as if I did not care what I did, provided it was

not absolutely wrong, and that it served to vary my life and yield a moment's interest. I took a fancy to change myself into a Catholic and go and make a real confession to see what it was like. Knowing me as you do, you will think this odd, but when people are by themselves they have singular fancies. A penitent was occupied in confessing. They do not go into the sort of pew or cloister which the priest occupies, but kneel down on the steps and confess through a grating. Both the confessor and the penitent whisper very low, you can hardly hear their voices. After I had watched two or three penitents go and return I approached at last and knelt down in a niche which was just vacated. I had to kneel there ten minutes waiting, for on the other side was another penitent invisible to me. At last that one went away, and a little wooden door inside the grating opened, and I saw the priest leaning his ear towards me. I was obliged to begin, and yet I did not know a word of the formula with which they always commence their confessions. It was a funny position. I felt precisely as I did when alone on the Thames at midnight. I commenced

with saying I was a foreigner, and had been brought up a Protestant. The priest asked if I was a Protestant then. I somehow could not tell a lie, and said 'yes.' He replied that in that case I could not 'jouir du bonheur de la confesse;' but I was determined to confess; and at last he said he would allow me because it might be the first step towards returning to the true Church. I actually did confess—a real confession. When I had done he told me his address, and said that every morning I was to go to the rue du Parc—to his house—and he would reason with me, and try to convince me of the error and enormity of being a Protestant! I promised faithfully to go. Of course, however, the adventure stops there, and I hope I shall never see the priest again. I think you had better not tell papa of this. He will not understand that it was only a freak, and will perhaps think I am going to turn Catholic."[1]

This morbidness increased, and at the end of the year she resolved to go home, her father's increasing tendency to blindness fortifying her resolution.

[1] *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle.*

Armed with a certificate from M. Héger that told of her qualifications for teaching the French language, she started for England, and was again in Haworth at the beginning of January 1844.

A few days later she wrote to a friend—

"Every one asks me what I am going to do, now that I am returned home; and every one seems to expect that I should immediately commence a school. In truth, it is what I should wish to do. I desire it above all things. I have sufficient money for the undertaking, and I hope now sufficient qualifications to give me a fair chance of success; yet I cannot permit myself to enter upon life—to touch the object which seems now within my reach, and which I have been so long straining to attain. You will ask me why. It is on papa's account; he is now, as you know, getting old, and it grieves me to tell you that he is losing his sight. I have felt for some months that I ought not to be away from him; and I feel now that it would be too selfish to leave him (at least as long as Branwell and Anne are absent), in order to pursue selfish interests of

my own. With the help of God I will try to deny myself in this matter, and to wait.

"I suffered much before I left Brussels. I think, however long I live, I shall not forget what the parting with M. Héger cost me; it grieved me so much to grieve him, who has been so true, kind and disinterested a friend. At parting he gave me a kind of diploma certifying my abilities as a teacher, sealed with the seal of the Athénée Royal, of which he is professor. I was much surprised also at the degree of regret expressed by my Belgian pupils, when they knew I was going to leave. I did not think it had been in their phlegmatic nature. . . ."

I have said that Brussels episode was the turning-point of Charlotte Brontë's career. To what extent this was due to the personal influence of M. Héger, the first man of any real cultivation she had so far met—for Mr. Brontë's Cambridge career left him essentially illiterate, and his curates were worse—it is not easy to say. M. Héger kindled her intellectual impulses, and that was no small thing. That he won any very great control

over her moral nature there is no reason to believe. Surely one takes the nature of an artist too pedantically to assume that her heroes in *Villette* and *The Professor* are primarily biographical.

It is sufficient that M. Héger knew good literature from bad, that he had a sense of perspective, and that his teaching, his criticism, his loans of books, all made for a sound education. Charlotte Brontë, despite her genius, could not, one may believe, have " arrived " had she not met M. Héger. She went to Brussels full of the crude ambitions, the semi-literary impulses that are so common on the fringe of the writing world. She left Brussels a woman of genuine cultivation, of educated tastes, armed with just the equipment that was to enable her to write the books of which two generations of her countrymen have been justly proud.

CHAPTER VIII

POEMS

THE idea of starting a school which had been the primary motive for the Brussels enterprise naturally gathered shape when Charlotte rejoined her sisters at Haworth in the beginning of 1844. As a first step applications were made to one or two friends—to Mrs. White, for example, in whose family Charlotte had been a nursery governess before she left for Brussels. But these friends had already arranged for their children's education elsewhere, and there was nothing for it but advertisement. A circular was printed, offering board and education for £35 per annum, with sundry "extras," including the French and German that it had taken the girls so much trouble and expense to acquire. All was in vain, however. "Every one wishes us well, but there are no pupils to be had," Charlotte writes to a friend. Yet a little

later she writes again: "We have made no alterations yet in our house. It would be folly to do so, while there is so little likelihood of ever getting pupils."

So a year rolled on and still another in the quiet Yorkshire parsonage. Time made it clear that not only were there no pupils to be had but that they were not even desirable. Branwell, the once much loved brother was at home, hopelessly wrecking his life with dram drinking and drugs, the father fighting his son's malady as best he could, sleeping in the same room with him. "The poor old man and I have had a terrible night of it," Branwell is reported to have been heard to mutter one morning; "he does his best, the poor old man, but it is all over with me."

"Meanwhile, life wears away," Charlotte writes in March, 1845; "I shall soon be thirty; and I have done nothing yet." But before that year had closed the three sisters were busy in the always exhilarating occupation of preparing a book for the press. This was a volume of poems. Charlotte has herself recorded the circumstances under

which she, Emily and Anne published this little volume, through which they hoped to climb the ladder of fame. She has told us that in the autumn of 1845 she accidentally lighted upon a MS. volume of verse in Emily's handwriting which she considered to be "condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine." "It took hours," her sister tells us, "to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication."

An interesting glimpse is here given us by Charlotte of Emily's remarkable aloofness. So shy was she that "on the recesses of her mind not even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed." Anne, less painfully reticent, speedily produced her compositions, "intimating that, since Emily's had given me pleasure, I might like to look at hers." "I could not," Charlotte continues, "but be a partial judge, yet I thought that those verses, too, had a sweet, serene pathos of their own."

The three sisters determined to publish. To find a publisher on any terms was, however, not easy.

Many to whom they applied did not even trouble to answer. Finally they arranged with two young booksellers and stationers of Paternoster Row—Aylott & Jones—who did but little publishing, but who, a few years later, were to give their imprint to the four parts of *The Germ*, that interesting adventure of the Pre-Raphaelite Brethren. From the correspondence with Aylott & Jones, which has been preserved, we learn that the three sisters paid £36 10*s*. for the printing and binding, and yet another £10 or £12 for advertising the book. Ten years later, when Charlotte had made a reputation with *Jane Eyre*, her publishers, Smith, Elder, gave her £24 for the copyright, and they reissued the book with a new title page, using up the old sheets. Even then there was no call for a second edition.

The little book of less than 200 pages duly appeared. It was reviewed in the *Athenaeum*, where the critic discovered that Ellis possessed "a fine quaint spirit" and "an evident power of wing, that may reach heights not here attempted." There is a letter from Charlotte extant in which she thanks the editor of *The Dublin University*

Magazine for "the indulgent notice" that appeared in his last issue.[1] As an outcome of it all, but two copies only were sold. Undismayed at the world's coldness, Charlotte "used up" some of the copies by sending them to the leaders of contemporary literature—to Wordsworth, Tennyson, Lockhart, and De Quincey among others.

There were nineteen poems by Currer Bell in the little volume, twenty-one by Ellis, and the same number by Acton. Charlotte has said the last word on the collection when in the preface to her sister's *Remains* [2] she said:—

"The book was printed; it is scarcely known, and all of it that merits to be known are the poems of Ellis Bell. The fixed conviction I held, and hold, of the worth of these poems has not indeed received the confirmation of much favourable criticism; but I must retain it notwithstanding."

Ellis Bell, indeed, was *the* poet. Currer was to give one out of many demonstrations of the fact

[1] It is given in full in a note to the Haworth Edition of Mrs. Gaskell's *Life*.

[2] In the introduction to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*.

that a writer may be a most forcible and effective master of prose, and yet have no capacity whatever for verse that deserves to be called poetry. Anne Brontë, however, or "Acton Bell," wrote verse that has at least found its way into some hymn-books. It is a distinction that would probably have pleased her more than any other kind of literary fame.

Ellis Bell was, it will ever be acknowledged, the one poet of a family many members of which attempted verse. The lines in this little volume entitled "The Old Stoic" will certainly keep their place in English literature for all time:—

Riches I hold in light esteem;
And love I laugh to scorn;
And lust of fame was but a dream
That vanished with the morn:

And if I pray, the only prayer
That moves my lips for me
Is, "Leave the heart that now I bear,
And give me liberty!"

Yes, as my swift days near their goal,
'Tis all that I implore;
In life and death, a chainless soul,
With courage to endure.

In the "Selections" from the poems by Ellis and Acton Bell that Charlotte Brontë added to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, there is contained a biographical fragment that is unapproachable in its simple pathos. No biographer would be well advised to try to paraphrase what is here said, or indeed to change it by a line:—

"My sister Emily loved the moors. Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her; out of a sullen hollow in a livid hill-side her mind could make an Eden. She found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best-loved was—liberty.

* * * * * *

"After the age of twenty, having meantime studied alone with diligence and perseverance, she went with me to an establishment on the Continent: the same suffering and conflict ensued, heightened by the strong recoil of her upright, heretic and English spirit from the gentle Jesuitry of the foreign and Romish system. Once more she seemed sinking, but this time she rallied through the mere

force of resolution: with inward remorse and shame she looked back on her former failure, and resolved to conquer in this second ordeal. She did conquer; but the victory cost her dear. She was never happy till she carried her hard-won knowledge back to the remote English village, the old parsonage-house, and desolate Yorkshire hills. A very few years more, and she looked her last on those hills, and breathed her last in that house, and under the aisle of that obscure village church she found her last lowly resting-place. Merciful was the decree that spared her when she was a stranger in a strange land, and guarded her dying bed with kindred love and congenial constancy."

In those "Selections" also Charlotte Brontë has preserved for us a poem of supreme worth, a poem that will take its place as one of the very best in all literature written by a woman. "They were," her sister tells us, "the last lines that Emily ever wrote":—

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

O God within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity!
Life—that in me has rest,
As I—undying Life—have power in Thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts: unutterably vain;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by Thine infinity;
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void:
Thou—THOU art Being and Breath,
And what THOU art may never be destroyed.

Not less memorable perhaps are the stanzas that accompany the "Last Lines," and will be pre-

served with them in all competent anthologies of English poetry:—

Often rebuked, yet always back returning
To those first feelings that were born with me,
And leaving busy chase of wealth and learning
For idle dreams of things which cannot be:

To-day, I will seek not the shadowy region;
Its unsustaining vastness waxes drear;
And visions rising, legion after legion,
Bring the unreal world too strangely near.

I'll walk, but not in old heroic traces,
And not in paths of high morality,
And not among the half-distinguished faces,
The clouded forms of long-past history.

I'll walk where my own nature would be leading:
It vexes me to choose another guide:
Where the gray flocks in ferny glens are feeding,
Where the wild wind blows on the mountain side.

What have those lonely mountains worth revealing?
More glory and more grief than I can tell:
The earth that wakes *one* human heart to feeling
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell.

CHAPTER IX

BRANWELL BRONTË

BRANWELL, or Patrick Branwell Brontë, was twenty-nine years of age when his three sisters issued their volume of poems, and he died two years later without, as Charlotte tells us, ever having known that his sisters had published a line, although *Jane Eyre*, *Agnes Grey*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *Wuthering Heights* had all appeared before his death. In after years, when the whole family had become extinct, a rumour grew up, which found its origin in Haworth gossip, to the effect that Branwell wrote *Wuthering Heights* —that he had claimed to have done so. Such a rumour is discredited for any intelligent person by Charlotte's disclaimer which was conveyed in a letter to her friend, Mr. W. S. Williams, announcing Branwell's death:—

" My unhappy brother never knew what his sis-

ters had done in literature—he was not aware that they had ever published a line. We could not tell him of our efforts for fear of causing him too deep a pang of remorse for his own time misspent and talents misapplied."

It is discredited further, if that were necessary, from the fact that Branwell, with an "itch" for writing, seems never to have produced prose or poetry of any distinction. Charlotte's letters are always full of character, Branwell's always ineffective, and his many little books that I have read in manuscript, some of them written long after he was twenty years of age, are singularly feeble. The braggadocio of the entirely worthless young man, anxious to shine and constantly talking of his literary talents—of what he was always *going* to achieve, could easily account for the fact that, looking backwards, some of his old friends and cronies would be persuaded that Branwell had actually assured them that he wrote the book which was only published ten months before his death—at a time when he was in the lowest depths of alcoholism. When he died *Wuthering Heights* had probably

not sold a hundred copies, and its authorship was certainly an entire secret to these friends who did not say one word about the son's claims until his father had died thirteen years later.

The growth of the legend as to Branwell's authorship is indeed amazing. We find for example that Mr. January Searle, writing in *The Mirror*, gives a most circumstantial account of conversations with Branwell concerning a story he had written, and indeed he is made to discuss pretty freely Charlotte's novel as well. Another acquaintance, Newman Dearden, contributed to the *Halifax Guardian* of 1867 some facts, as he called them, whence we learn that Branwell read to this and other friends, a large part of the story in manuscript exactly as it reads in *Wuthering Heights*. Yet another witness, Edward Sloane, of Halifax, made similar statements, and Francis Grundy is even more explicit as the following passage indicates:—

"Patrick Brontë declared to me, and what his sister said bore out the assertion, that he wrote a great portion of *Wuthering Heights* himself. In-

deed, it is impossible for me to read that story without meeting with many passages which I feel certain *must* have come from his pen. The weird fancies of diseased genius with which he used to entertain me in our long talks at Luddendenfoot reappear in the pages of the novel, and I am inclined to believe that the very plot was his invention rather than his sister's." [1]

All this "evidence" causes little commotion in the mind of any one who has watched how legends grow and gather force. Branwell could not have written a line of *Wuthering Heights,* although he did doubtless furnish phrases for the mouth of this or that example of human wreckage flitting so tragically through its pages. His last two years of life, the years of his three sisters' greatest literary activity, were spent by him in utter debasement entirely outside all intellectual interests. He was the author of his sisters' books only so far as he was the shameful cause of their intense isolation during this period. "Branwell still remains at home, and while he is here you shall not come.

[1] *Memories of the Past,* by Francis H. Grundy.

I am more confirmed in that resolution the more I know of him," writes Charlotte to her friend, Ellen Nussey, in November 1845, and thence to his death, in September 1848, things grew worse and worse.

Yet Branwell had started with high hopes and higher dreams on the part of his sisters, who began by thinking him so much more richly endowed than themselves. A letter written by Charlotte to her brother in 1832, when Branwell was fifteen years of age and she was sixteen, commences with the intimation that " as usual " she addresses her weekly letter to him, " because to you I find the most to say." This intimate affection seems to have prevailed until the time when Branwell took his flight from the nest. How much he was the spoilt child of the Haworth circle, the favourite in particular of the aunt, who would necessarily think more of him than of all her nieces put together, is shown by reference to Anne Brontë's novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the book in which we have more glimpses than in any other of the Brontë home life; Mrs. Markham, in that story, is obviously a

picture of Miss Branwell, and precisely as Gilbert Markham's sisters thought of their mother's partiality would Branwell's sisters think about the treatment meted out to their brother by his affectionate aunt:—

"I was too late for tea: but my mother had kindly kept the tea-pot and muffin warm upon the hob, and, though she scolded me a little, readily admitted my excuses; and when I complained of the flavour of the overdrawn tea, she poured the remainder into the slop-basin, and bade Rose put some fresh into the pot, and reboil the kettle, which offices were performed with great commotion, and certain remarkable comments.

"'Well!—if it had been me now, I should have had no tea at all—if it had been Fergus, even, he would have to put up with such as there was, and been told to be thankful, for it was far too good for him; but you—we can't do too much for you. It's always so—if there's anything particularly nice at table, mamma winks and nods at me, to abstain from it, and if I don't attend to that, she whispers, "Don't eat so much of that, Rose; Gilbert will

like it for his supper "—I'm nothing at all. In the parlour, it's " Come, Rose, put away your things, and let's have the room nice and tidy against they come in: and keep up a good fire; Gilbert likes a cheerful fire." In the kitchen—" Make that pie a large one, Rose; I dare say the boys'll be hungry; and don't put so much pepper in, they'll not like it, I'm sure," or " Rose, don't put so many spices in the pudding; Gilbert likes it plain,"—or, " Mind you put plenty of currants in the cake, Fergus likes plenty." If I say, " Well, mamma, I don't," I'm told I ought not to think of myself—" you know, Rose, in all household matters, we have only two things to consider, first, what's proper to be done, and, secondly, what's most agreeable to the gentlemen of the house—anything will do for the ladies." '

" ' And very good doctrine too,' said my mother, ' Gilbert thinks so I'm sure.' "

Branwell's life story in its concluding chapters is not exhilarating. He was intended for a painter, and there were dreams in the Haworth parsonage of great fame to be acquired after study

at the Royal Academy Schools. He had already shown some moderate talent in this direction under the tuition of William Robinson, a portrait painter of Leeds, at a time when it will be remembered every town had its portrait painter and no photographer, when every sitting-room was decorated or disfigured by huge canvases, representing the heads of the family. Branwell had certainly as much talent for portrait painting as many of these "artists," and so to London he went with high hopes. But London, it is clear, taught him nothing that was of value to him; perhaps it gave the first impulse in his demoralization. In any case life in London was too costly for the son of a poorly paid village priest, and the boy returned home. This was in 1835. For the next three years he would have seemed to have done little but loaf about the village, nominally a portrait painter, actually the secretary of the Masonic Lodge at Haworth—"The Lodge of the Three Graces," and the boon companion of every one who enjoyed conviviality, a most unfortunate life for a young man of twenty. He did, however, continue his art studies under

Robinson at Leeds, and painted many portraits there and at Bradford. There is a very human picture of him in one of Charlotte's letters to a friend, dated 1838, when Branwell was twenty-one. Her friends, Mary and Martha Taylor, were visiting her:—

"They are making such a noise about me, I cannot write any more. Mary is playing on the piano; Martha is chattering as fast as her little tongue can run; and Branwell is standing before her, laughing at her vivacity."

The beginning of January 1840 saw Branwell at Broughton-in-Furness, as tutor in the family of a Mr. Postlethwaite, concerning which experience of his all we know is from a letter which says:—

"I am fixed in a little retired town by the seashore, among the wild woody hills that rise around me—huge, rocky, and capped with clouds. My employer is a retired county magistrate, a large landowner, and of a right hearty and generous disposition. His wife is a quiet, silent and amiable woman, and his sons are two fine spirited lads." [1]

[1] Leyland's *Brontë Family.*

Branwell did not lodge with the family, but with a surgeon in the town. His tutorship was probably a dire failure, although Mr. Leyland declares that it ended at Mr. Brontë's instigation in June, that is, after five months. It is scarcely probable that Mr. Brontë could have desired that his son should once more enter upon the loafing life at Haworth, nor can Branwell's next effort to earn a living be considered a rise in social position. In October 1840, he obtained a situation as clerk-in-charge at Sowerby Bridge Station, on the Leeds and Manchester Railway. Hence he was transferred after a few months to Luddendenfoot, on the same line. Here we have pictures of him from two quarters—Mr. Francis Grundy and Mr. William Heaton. The former was a railway engineer stationed in the district, who thus describes Branwell at this time:—

"Insignificantly small; a mass of red hair, which he wore brushed high off his forehead—to help his height, I fancy; a great, lumpy, intellectual forehead, nearly half the size of the whole facial contour; small ferrety eyes, deep-sunk, and still further

hidden by the never removed spectacles; prominent nose, but weak lower features. Small and thin of person, he was the reverse of attractive at first sight." [1]

Mr. Heaton apparently had a great admiration for the railway clerk, unless, as we suspect, this came like so many of the reminiscences of Branwell, as a sentiment born of after knowledge of the genius of the family, when to have known any one of the dead and gone Brontës was to reap a kind of reflected glory throughout Yorkshire, and indeed everywhere. That Branwell should have been able to quote scraps of popular poetry was, we see, a sign of power to this admirer:—

"His talents were of a very exalted kind. I have heard him quote pieces from the Bard of Avon, from Shelley, Wordsworth and Byron, as well as from Butler's *Hudibras*, in such a manner as often made me wish I had been a scholar, as he was." [2]

If he were a "scholar," Branwell, unhappily,

[1] *Pictures of the Past*, by Francis H. Grundy, 1879.
[2] *The Brontë Family*, by Francis A. Leyland, 1886.

lacked the practicality that would have made a competent railway booking-clerk, and after twelve months at Luddendenfoot he was dismissed by the Company, it having been found that the accounts at this station were in utter confusion. Preliminary to leaving he had to appear before some of the directors, when his most intimate friend, William Weightman—Mr. Brontë's curate at Haworth at the time—accompanied him.

It was at this period, early in 1842, that a definite deterioration took place in Branwell. His sisters Charlotte and Emily were in Brussels, Anne was in a situation as governess, the aunt was dying. Branwell was spending all his time in the village inn. One last effort he made to earn a livelihood. He was engaged as tutor in the family where Anne was a governess—her second position of the kind. This was with Mr. Edmund Robinson, a wealthy clergyman not holding any living, but residing at Thorpe Green, Little Ouseburn, in Yorkshire. Here began—in 1842—the sordid "romance," concerning which too much has been written. Branwell became enamoured of his employer's

wife and persuaded himself and all his friends that he had received encouragement. That Mrs. Robinson, many years younger than her husband, did feel a certain kindliness for the eccentric youth is undoubted. Anne Brontë, who was on the spot, clearly felt that she was considerably to blame. But that she was entirely guiltless of any serious wrong may now be accepted as indisputable. The legend that grew up in the Haworth home had no basis but in the perfervid imagination of the now thoroughly debased Branwell, who talked continuously of his wrongs after Mr. Robinson had turned him out of the house, who declared that the woman loved him and would marry him when her fast-failing husband died. Mr. Robinson died, and Branwell spread the further legend that the widow would marry him had her husband not made a will which would render her penniless did she do so. The will of Mr. Robinson, who died in May 1846, demonstrates that he put no restraint whatever upon the future action of his wife. Branwell succeeded in disgusting his sisters, and entirely alienating them, but at the same time they

accepted too easily his own account of the affair. Mrs. Gaskell and Miss Nussey, for example, were both persuaded that Branwell Brontë's disastrous end was due to a wicked intrigue. So entirely had Mrs. Gaskell caught Charlotte Brontë's own view of her brother's end that she told Miss Nussey of her intention to avenge him upon the "wicked woman." Throwing all discretion to the winds, she ventured, in the first edition of her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, upon an attack on Mrs. Robinson that is surprising in its vehemence and its libelousness. That she escaped with an apology and the withdrawal of the offending passages in later editions of the *Life* must be counted for greater good fortune than she recognised.

Meanwhile let us turn to Branwell as we see him in his last days in his sister's correspondence. Writing to Ellen Nussey, in April 1846, Charlotte says:—

"Branwell stays at home, and degenerates instead of improving. It has been lately intimated to him that he would be received again on the railroad where he was formerly stationed if he would

Born 1817 *Died* 1848

Patrick Branwell Brontë

From a Silhouette in the possession of the Rev. A. B. Nicholls

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behave more steadily, but he refuses to make an effort; he will not work; and at home he is a drain on every resource—an impediment to all happiness."

A year later things are no better, there is the same story of wreckage and powerlessness of will. In May 1847 she writes:—

"Branwell is quieter now, and for a reason: he has got to the end of a considerable sum of money, and consequently is obliged to restrict himself in some degree."

In yet another year it is the same, for in July 1848 we have the following:—

"Branwell is the same in conduct as ever. His constitution seems much shattered. Papa, and sometimes all of us, have sad nights with him: he sleeps most of the day, and consequently will lie awake at night."

Then, in September 1848 came the end, as one of Charlotte's letters describes it:—

"'We have hurried our dead out of our sight.' A lull begins to succeed the gloomy tumult of last week. It is not permitted us to grieve for him

who is gone as others grieve for those they lose. The removal of our only brother must necessarily be regarded by us rather in the light of a mercy than a chastisement. Branwell was his father's and his sisters' pride and hope in boyhood, but since manhood the case has been otherwise. It has been our lot to see him take a wrong bent; to hope, expect, wait his return to the right path; to know the sickness of hope deferred, the dismay of prayer baffled; to experience despair at last—and now to behold the sudden early obscure close of what might have been a noble career.

"I do not weep from a sense of bereavement—there is no prop withdrawn, no consolation torn away, no dear companion lost—but for the wreck of talent, the ruin of promise, the untimely dreary extinction of what might have been a burning and a shining light. My brother was a year my junior. I had aspirations and ambitions for him once, long ago—they have perished mournfully. Nothing remains of him but a memory of errors and sufferings. There is such a bitterness of pity for his life and death, such a yearning for the emptiness of his

whole existence as I cannot describe. I trust time will allay these feelings.

" My poor father naturally thought more of his *only* son than of his daughters, and, much and long as he had suffered on his account, he cried out for his loss like David for that of Absalom—my son! my son!—and refused at first to be comforted.

* * * * * *

" When I looked upon the noble face and forehead of my dead brother (nature had favoured him with a fairer outside as well as a finer constitution than his sisters) and asked myself what had made him go ever wrong, tend ever downwards, when he had so many gifts to induce to, and aid in, an upward course, I seemed to receive an oppressive revelation of the feebleness of humanity—of the inadequacy of even genius to lead to true greatness if unaided by religion and principle. In the value, or even the reality, of these two things he would never believe till within a few days of his end; and then all at once he seemed to open his heart to a conviction of their existence and worth.

The remembrance of this strange change now comforts my poor father greatly. I myself, with painful, mournful joy, heard him praying softly in his dying moments; and to the last prayer which my father offered up at his bedside he added, 'Amen.' How unusual that word appeared from his lips, of course you, who did not know him, cannot conceive. Akin to this alteration was that in his feelings towards his relations—all the bitterness seemed gone.

"When the struggle was over, and a marble calm began to succeed the last dread agony, I felt, as I had never felt before, that there was peace and forgiveness for him in Heaven. All his errors—to speak plainly, all his vices—seemed nothing to me in that moment: every wrong he had done, every pain he had caused, vanished; his sufferings only were remembered; the wrench to the natural affections only was left. If man can thus experience total oblivion of his fellow's imperfections, how much more can the Eternal Being, who made man, forgive His creature?

"Had his sins been scarlet in their dye, I believe

now they are white as wool. He is at rest, and that comforts us all. Long before he quitted this world, life had no happiness for him." [1]

A very substantial literature has been devoted to Branwell Brontë, a circumstance that can only be accounted for from the fact that he had so considerable an influence upon the life and work of his sisters. On that account alone we cannot say with Mr. Augustine Birrell, that we have "no use for this young man." Quite a collection of documents concerning him are to be found in a book by Mr. Francis Leyland, called *The Brontë Family*. Mr. Leyland's two volumes were principally taken up with extracts from Branwell's writings, and he appeared to see in these indications of a genius which is certainly not there. Branwell must have had an interesting personality before his final deterioration, at least compared with the type of people among whom he was thrown; but he was not endowed with gifts of a very high order. Had it not been for the literary successes of his sisters

[1] Extracts from two letters to W. S. Williams, in *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle.*

his name would long since have been forgotten. We do not owe to him a single memorable line. For the three or four years before his death he succeeded in making every one in his home profoundly miserable. Whether that was a gain to art or not cannot easily be decided; but even taking into consideration the indirect service to his sisters by the unconscious suggestion of "copy," one may yet say with unqualified emphasis that it would have been better for poor Branwell Brontë and for every one connected with him if he had never been born.

CHAPTER X

THE PUBLICATIONS OF MR. NEWBY

It was in April 1846 that Charlotte Brontë wrote the first letter that gave indications that the little village of Haworth had in its midst three young women whose hearts were palpitating with ambition to shine in prose composition as well as in poetry. This letter was addressed to Aylott & Jones, the booksellers, who had engaged to issue for Charlotte and her sisters a little volume of poems. It was thus she wrote, signing her own name:—

"C., E., and A. Bell are now preparing for the press a work of fiction consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales, which may be published either together, as a work of three volumes of the ordinary novel size, or separately as single volumes, as shall be deemed most advisable."

The authors, Miss Brontë explained, still main-

taining the pleasant fiction that she was acting for three young men in her father's parish, were not prepared to publish at their own expense. Would Aylott & Jones, she asked, consider the MSS., and would they publish in the event of thinking its contents such as to warrant the expectation of success? Messrs. Aylott & Jones courteously replied that they did not wish to enter upon publishing ventures of this kind, but they gave advice as to the methods of approaching the various London houses which issued fiction, and for this Charlotte Brontë thanked them cordially in a later letter.

The three novels that the sisters then cherished the hope of publishing were *The Professor* by Charlotte, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily, and *Agnes Grey* by Anne. The precise manner in which *The Professor* became detached from the books by Emily and Anne has never been made clear. All three sisters sent their books travelling from publisher to publisher, and Charlotte, in the hour of her success, more than once referred to the unfortunate journey of *The Professor,* which, it may be added, reached Smith and Elder in a wrap-

per that bore other tell-tale addresses. To Mr. George Henry Lewes she wrote years later:—

"My work (a tale in one volume) being completed, I offered it to a publisher. He said it was original, faithful to nature, but he did not feel warranted in accepting it; such a work would not sell. I tried six publishers in succession; they all told me it was deficient in 'startling interest' and 'thrilling excitement,' that it would never suit the circulating libraries, and as it was on those libraries the success of fiction mainly depended, they could not undertake to publish what would be overlooked there." [1]

Mrs. Gaskell records that some of the refusals were not over-courteously worded. Then came the oft-recorded triumph when the firm of Smith and Elder, in rejecting *The Professor,* declared that a work in three volumes would meet with careful attention—and *Jane Eyre* was accepted. At a much later date Charlotte tried, more than once, to persuade her publishers to print *The Professor,* and being refused, wrote half-angrily, half-re-

[1] Mrs. Gaskell, Haworth Edition, May 20, 1847.

proachfully, to her friend Mr. George Smith, declaring that the book had now been refused *nine* times by "The Trade," three of the refusals having come from the house that had been so willing to publish her later books. "My feelings," she continued, "can only be paralleled by those of a doting parent towards an idiot child," Mr. Williams sharing with her, she declared, the distinction of being the only person who saw merit in it.[1]

But all this is to anticipate—yet it was a curious irony of fate that left the work of the one of the three sisters who was to obtain any substantial popularity thus stranded, while the work of Emily and Anne found itself at least printed, although not published. It is clear that *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* also "travelled," but it is probable that *The Professor* was being retained for consideration at some other publisher's when the other stories fell into the hands of Mr. Newby. Miss Brontë afterwards said that they were accepted "on terms somewhat impoverishing to the two authors." In any case Charlotte speedily caught

[1] Mrs. Gaskell, Haworth Edition, page 516.

up in the race. Thus she writes to Mr. W. S. Williams on November 10, 1847:—

"A prose work, by Ellis and Acton, will soon appear; it should have been out, indeed, long since, for the first proof sheets were already in the press at the commencement of last August, before Currer Bell had placed the MS. of *Jane Eyre* in your hands. Mr. Newby, however, does not do business like Messrs. Smith and Elder; a different spirit seems to preside at Mortimer Street to that which guides the helm at 65, Cornhill. . . . My relations have suffered from exhausting delay and procrastination, while I have to acknowledge the benefits of a management at once business-like and gentleman-like, energetic and considerate. I should like to know if Mr. Newby often acts as he has done to my relations, or whether this is an exceptional instance of his method. Do you know, and can you tell me anything about him?"

Mr. Newby, who thus accepted *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, the only novel by Emily Brontë, and the first novel by Anne, appears to have belonged to the order of publishers described

by Robert Louis Stevenson when he said of the late Mr. Kegan Paul, "Kegan is a good fellow, but Paul is a d—d scoundrel." There would however appear to have been little of the "good fellow" about Newby, for although professing to be shocked at *Wuthering Heights*, he published it for a consideration, and when *Jane Eyre* had taken the world by storm, he gave out that his books by the Bells were by the same author, and promptly accepted another novel by Anne—*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*—on the fly-leaf of which he inserted an advertisement of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, containing "Opinions of the Press." The *Spectator* declares that "the work bears affinity to *Jane Eyre*." *John Bull*, that it is "written with considerable ability." Douglas Jerrold's *Journal* that "the work is strangely original. It reminds us of *Jane Eyre*. The author is a Salvator Rosa with his pen. We strongly recommend all our readers who love novelty to get this story, for we can promise them they never read anything like it before. It is like *Jane Eyre*." "It is a colossal performance," said the *Atlas*.

In this connection it is well worth while repeating the review in the *Athenaeum* for December 25, 1847. There is surely something very fascinating about old reviews of books that afterwards become classics:—

"*Wuthering Heights*, by Ellis Bell; *Agnes Grey*, by Acton Bell; 3 vols.

"*Jane Eyre*, it will be recollected, was edited by Mr. Currer Bell. Here are two tales so nearly related to *Jane Eyre* in cast of thought, incident and language as to excite some curiosity. All three might be the work of one hand, but the first issued remains the best. In spite of much power and cleverness, in spite of its truth to life in the remote nooks and corners of England, *Wuthering Heights* is a disagreeable story. The Bells seem to affect painful and exceptional subjects: the misdeeds and oppressions of tyranny, the eccentricities of 'woman's fantasy.' They do not turn away from dwelling upon those physical acts of cruelty which we know to have their warrant in the real annals of crime and suffering, but the contemplation of which true taste rejects. The brutal master of the lonely

house on *Wuthering Heights*—a prison which might be pictured from life—has doubtless had his prototype in those ungenial and remote districts where human beings, like the trees, grow gnarled and dwarfed and distorted by the inclement climate; but he might have been indicated with far fewer touches, in place of so entirely filling the canvas that there is hardly a scene untainted by his presence. It was a like dreariness, a like unfortunate selection of objects, which cut short the popularity of Charlotte Smith's novels, rich though they be in true pathos and faithful descriptions of nature. Enough of what is mean and bitterly painful and degrading gathers round every one of us during the course of his pilgrimage through this vale of tears to absolve the artist from choosing his incidents and characters out of such a dismal catalogue; and if the Bells, singly or collectively, are contemplating future or frequent utterances in fiction, let us hope that they will spare us further interiors so gloomy as the one here elaborated with such dismal minuteness. In this respect *Agnes Grey* is more acceptable to us, though less power-

ful. It is the tale of a governess who undergoes much that is in the real bond of a governess's endurance; but the new victim's trials are of a more ignoble quality than those which awaited *Jane Eyre*. In the house of the Bloomfields the governess is subjected to torment by terrible children (as the French have it); in that of the Murrays she has to witness the ruin wrought by false indulgence on two coquettish girls, whose coquetries jeopardise her own heart's secret. In both these tales there is so much feeling for character, and nice marking of scenery, that we cannot leave them without once again warning their authors against what is eccentric and unpleasant. Never was there a period in our history of Society when we English could so ill afford to dispense with sunshine."

But to return to Mr. Newby, who published, as we have seen, from Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square, and later (from 1850 to 1874) in Welbeck Street. He seems to have cared only for making money out of his authors—nothing at all for the literary honours of the business. One of his own brothers said to Mrs. Riddell, the novelist—

"Were I you I would not say that Newby had published anything for me."

Altogether Newby published nine volumes for the Brontës, and these original nine volumes are before me as I write. Three volumes containing *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* by Anne Brontë, and three further volumes form a second edition of that book. To this Anne wrote a Preface. Far more valuable are the three volumes containing *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. A catalogue at the end of these volumes indicates that Mr. Newby had at any rate many good authors on his lists. There we find a book by George Grote—*Letters on the Recent Politics of Switzerland*—a book by Leopold von Ranke, *A History of the Roman Monarchy* and Captain Medwin's *Life of Shelley*. But for the most part the books are now long forgotten novels; association with *Wuthering Heights* would probably be Mr. Newby's one literary distinction to-day were it not that one only remembers that he added additional bitterness to the always essentially unhappy life of Emily Brontë.

In 1848 Charlotte Brontë frankly tells her friends of Smith and Elder, who were prepared to publish Ellis and Acton as well as Currer Bell, that her sisters are pledged to Newby for their next novels, that being one of his conditions for publication of their first works. It was however a letter from Newby to an American firm, stating that to the best of his belief the three Bells were all one person, that made Charlotte and Anne start for London to disclose their separate identities to Charlotte's own publishers.

The best account of that visit is contained in a letter that Charlotte wrote to her friend Mary Taylor, then in New Zealand. It is dated September 4, 1848, and in it she tells her friend that her sister Anne had published another book called *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* for which £25 had been paid; and she adds, " that as Acton Bell's publisher is a shuffling scamp I expect no more." She does not say, as she might have done, that the book was selling solely on account of the enormous success of *Jane Eyre,* but she does tell Miss Taylor of Newby's assertion that *Jane Eyre, Wuthering*

Heights, Agnes Grey and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* were all the productions of one writer. "This," she adds, "is a lie, as Newby had been told repeatedly that they were the productions of three different authors." A letter from Smith and Elder stating their troubles in the matter led to the experience which is best detailed in the following passage:—

"The upshot of it was that on the very day I received Smith and Elder's letter Anne and I packed up a small box, sent it down to Keighley, set out ourselves after tea, walked through a snow-storm to the station, got to Leeds, and whirled up by the night train to London, with the view of proving our separate identity to Smith and Elder, and confronting Newby with his lie.

"We arrived at the Chapter Coffee-house (our old place, Polly; we did not well know where else to go) about eight o'clock in the morning. We washed ourselves, had some breakfast, sat for a few minutes, and then set off in queer inward excitement to 65, Cornhill. Neither Mr. Smith nor Mr. Williams knew we were coming; they had

never seen us; they did not know whether we were men or women, but had always written to us as men."

The recognition at 65, Cornhill, was very dramatic, and the pleasant gossip with Mr. Smith and with his manager Mr. Williams, is related in detail. Then came visitors in the evening to that modest inn in Ivy Lane, Paternoster Row,—Mr. Smith in evening dress, and his sisters, "two elegant young ladies in full dress," the goal being the opera, where Charlotte, with a sick headache, was intensely self-conscious of what she called her "clownishness," while Anne "was calm and gentle as she always is."

The following day Mr. Williams took the two sisters to church, and in the afternoon Mr. Smith went with his carriage to take them to dine with his mother at Bayswater. "The rooms, the drawing-room especially, looked splendid to us." On Monday came another round of pleasure, and on Tuesday the sisters returned to Haworth. This letter concludes with the statement, "We saw Mr. Newby; but of him more another time."

It is a pity we have not that further letter, but there are other glimpses of Mr. Newby and his dealings. We learn, for example, that a further £25 was paid by Mr. Newby on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* but no more. *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* were published on condition that the authors shared the risks with the publisher, and they advanced £50 accordingly. There is no doubt that the other books sold sufficiently well to give more than that amount of author's profit—largely on the strength of the success of *Jane Eyre,* and the current belief that they were by the same author—yet Newby would seem never to have returned the £50, although Charlotte tried to extract it from him. "Do not give yourself much trouble about Mr. Newby," Charlotte writes later, "I have not the least expectation that you will be able to get anything from him. He has an evasive, shuffling plan of meeting, or rather eluding, such demands, against which it is fatiguing to contend"; and to the same correspondent, her friend Mr. George Smith, she writes still later: "As to Mr. Newby, he charms me. First there is the fascinat-

ing coyness with which he shuns your pursuit . . ." and she goes on to animadvert in a similar strain to the way in which she considered Mr. Newby had robbed her sisters, pretending he had spent all the profits of *Wuthering Heights* in advertising it. There pretty well one may leave Mr. Newby, and pass on to the books the publication of which gave him his only distinction.

CHAPTER XI

WUTHERING HEIGHTS

EMILY BRONTË has been called the Sphinx of our modern literature. Among English novelists she must always hold a position of eminence, although by virtue only of one book—*Wuthering Heights*. That book has a place by itself. There are greater novels doubtless, novels replete with humour and insight—qualities that it has not. But there is no book that has so entirely won the suffrage of some of the best minds of each generation since it appeared. This recognition began with Sydney Dobell, the author of *Balder;* it was continued by Mr. Matthew Arnold, whose oft-quoted lines will be remembered, written concerning one:—

> . . . whose soul
> Knew no fellow for might,
> Passion, vehemence, grief,
> Daring, since Byron died.

It culminated in the splendid eloquence of Mr. Swinburne, who places it with *King Lear*, the *Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Bride of Lammermoor*,[1] the well-weighed utterances of Mrs. Humphry Ward, to whom Emily Brontë's book is "pure mind and passion," [2] and of Maurice Maeterlinck,[3] whose tribute is the more interesting in that Belgium was the only country that Emily Brontë visited.—Sydney Dobell's criticism has naturally the most interest because it happens to be one of those contemporary verdicts which posterity has endorsed. In the *Palladium* of September 1850, Mr. Dobell declared "that there were passages in *Wuthering Heights* of which any novelist, past or present, might be proud."

"There are few things in modern prose to surpass these pages for native power," Mr. Dobell says of the first part of *Wuthering Heights*. The critic who treats of contemporaries almost always hesitates and halts in the dispensing of praise un-

[1] The *Athenaeum*, June 16, 1883.

[2] The Haworth Edition of *Wuthering Heights*. Introduction by Mrs. Humphry Ward.

[3] *Wisdom and Destiny*, by Maurice Maeterlinck.

less supported by popular applause. There was little enough of popular applause to greet *Wuthering Heights* at its first advent, and Mr. Dobell proved himself a good judge of literature in saying as much as he did. He scarcely accepted, it is true, Currer Bell's repudiation of identity with Ellis. But he clearly felt that Ellis's work was a thing apart. He hinted, indeed, that *Wuthering Heights* was an earlier work by the author of *Jane Eyre,* but he evidently had grave doubts concerning his own suggestion. To decide on the merits of a book of prose is, he urged, very much a matter of time. Does it remain in our memories? Do those who come after us find it equally unforgettable?

Sydney Dobell quoted certain passages when he wrote of *Wuthering Heights* to demonstrate his point that when one had once read some of its descriptions one never forgot them. He selected for example that amazing account of Lockwood's disturbed night, the child's face at the window:—

"Terror made me curse; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and

fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear."

This and the description of Heathcliff's anguish when Lockwood tells him of his nightmare are instanced by Dobell as unforgettable passages, and time has proved that his instinct was sound. Writing later concerning this review which concerned itself with *Jane Eyre* as well, Charlotte Brontë said to Miss Martineau:—

"One passage in it touched a deep chord. I mean when allusion is made to my sister Emily's novel *Wuthering Heights;* the justice there rendered comes indeed late, the wreath awarded drops in a grave, but no matter—I am grateful."

Yet, when all is said it is Charlotte Brontë's own tribute to her sister's novel that is the best of all:—

"*Wuthering Heights* was hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials. The statuary found a granite block on a solitary moor; gazing thereon he saw how from the crag might be elicited a head, savage, swart, sinister; a

form moulded with at least one element of grandeur—power. He wrought with a rude chisel, and from no model but the vision of his meditations. With time and labour the crag took human shape; and there it stands colossal, dark and frowning, half-statue, half-rock; in the former sense, terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful, for its colouring is of mellow grey, and moorland moss clothes it; and heath, with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance, grows faithfully close to the giant's foot."

* * * * * *

The silent and perhaps rather grim Emily took no part in the Sunday School and social work at Haworth that occupied her two sisters; she shrank away with her dogs from all human companionship whenever possible, roaming over those moors which brought her the only happiness and joy that she ever knew. She made no friends at Brussels, no single "comrade" at Miss Wooler's school. When she died—before her thirtieth birthday—she was as isolated from all companionship but that of her sister Anne as she had been twenty years before.

Not one scrap of self-revelation did Emily leave behind, two colourless letters to a friend of Charlotte's being well nigh the only memorials in her handwriting that have been preserved.[1] Her book also reveals nothing. Anne's novels were transparent transcripts from her narrow life. Charlotte transferred every incident of her experience into her books. Emily was never more aloof than in her great novel. It is dramatic, it is vivid and passionate, but it is never self-revealing. Emily learned German when in Brussels, and must have read the weird tales of Hoffman; she had, it may be, heard her father tell stories from Irish tradition as Dr. Wright and Miss Mary Robinson both assert. She had nearer home not only her own brother's miserable story with its mock heroics, but many other uncanny traditions of a kind to which Yorkshire is certainly as prone as County Down. Did she use any of these things? No one can say.

All speculation as to sources of inspiration is far beside the mark in appraising Emily Brontë's gen-

[1] These are apparently lost. The letters were given by Ellen Nussey to the late Lord Houghton, but have never been seen by his son the present Earl of Crewe.

ius. *Wuthering Heights* is a book by itself, with less indebtedness to earlier literature than most great novels. In my judgment it is the greatest book ever written by a woman. Those who have read it again and again and have found that it gripped them more forcibly at each succeeding reading have put it to a test indeed. Quotation from the book conveys little idea of its sustained power, although to quote such a passage as the one where Catherine Linton is in the incoherencies of her deathbed is to recall sentences that stand out boldly in the records of English fiction:—

"'That's a turkey's,' she murmured to herself, 'and this is a wild duck's, and this is a pigeon's. Ah, they put pigeons' feathers in the pillows—no wonder I couldn't die! Let me take care to throw it on the floor when I lie down. And here is a moorcock's; and this—I should know it among a thousand—it's a lapwing's. Bonny bird, wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds had touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not

shot; we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it, and the old ones dare not come. I made him promise he'd never shoot a lapwing after that, and he didn't. Yes, here are more! Did he shoot my lapwings, Nelly? Are they red, any of them? Let me look.'

* * * * * *

"'I see in you, Nelly,' she continued dreamily, 'an aged woman; you have grey hair and bent shoulders. This bed is the fairy cave under Peniston Crag, and you are gathering elf-bolts to hurt our heifers; pretending while I am near that they are only locks of wool. That's what you'll come to fifty years hence; I know you are not so now. I'm not wandering; you're mistaken, or else I should believe you really were that withered hag, and I should think I was under Peniston Crag; and I'm conscious it's night, and there are two candles on the table making the black press shine like jet.'

* * * * * *

"'One time, however, we were near quarrelling. He said the pleasantest manner of spending a hot July day was lying from morning till evening

on a bank of heath in the middle of the moors, with the bees humming dreamily about among the bloom, and the larks singing high up over head, and the blue sky, and bright sun shining steadily and cloudlessly. That was his most perfect idea of heaven's happiness—mine was rocking in a rustling green tree, with a west wind blowing, and bright, white clouds flitting rapidly above; and not only larks, but throstles, and blackbirds, and linnets, and cuckoos pouring out music on every side, and the moors seen at a distance, broken into cool dusky dells; but close by great swells of long grass undulating in waves to the breeze; and woods and sounding water, and the whole world awake and wild with joy. He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee.' "

These passages and many like them may be read again and again, but indeed I know of no novel that may be read repeatedly with more satisfaction. The whole group of tragic figures pass before us, and we are moved as in the presence of great tragedy. Emily Brontë was quite a young woman

when she wrote this book. One almost feels that it was necessary that she should die. Any further work from her pen must almost have been in the nature of an anteclimax. It were better that *Wuthering Heights* should stand, as does its author, in splendid isolation.

Let us picture for a moment, as well as we are able, the author of this remarkable novel. We meet her as a child of five at the Clergy Daughters' School at Casterton, where attached to her name inscribed in the books we are told that she " reads very prettily "; after that her home was all in all to her for many years, with a brief interval of three unhappy months at Miss Wooler's school. Then came certain miserable months as a governess at Law Hill, near Halifax,[1] and a happier in-

[1] Charlotte writes from Dewsbury Moor (October 2, 1836):— "My sister Emily is gone into a situation as teacher in a large school of near forty pupils, near Halifax. I have had one letter from her since her departure—it gives an appalling account of her duties. Hard labour from six in the morning until near eleven at night, with only one half-hour of exercise between. This is slavery. I fear she will never stand it."— Mrs. Gaskell's *Life*.

terval of a year in Brussels. Very scanty, indeed, is the record of these episodes. Only when her sisters had persuaded her to face the world in print does the picture become clearer. Take for example the following from a letter of Charlotte's to Mr. Williams:—

"I should much—very much—like to take that quiet view of the 'great world' you allude to, but I have as yet won no right to give myself such a treat: it must be for some future day—when, I don't know. Ellis, I imagine, would soon turn aside from the spectacle in disgust. I do not think he admits it as his creed that 'the proper study of mankind is man'—at least not the artificial man of cities. In some points I consider Ellis somewhat of a theorist: now and then he broaches ideas which strike my sense as much more daring and original than practical; his reason may be in advance of mine, but certainly it often travels a different road. I should say Ellis will not be seen in his full strength till he is seen as an essayist."

And this sadder passage from a letter to Miss Ellen Nussey:—

"I feel much more uneasy about my sisters than myself just now. Emily's cold and cough are very obstinate. I fear she has pain in the chest, and I sometimes catch a shortness in her breathing, when she has moved at all quickly. She looks very, very thin and pale. Her reserved nature occasions me great uneasiness of mind. It is useless to question her—you get no answers. It is still more useless to recommend remedies—they are never adopted."

And again to Mr. Williams:—

"I would fain hope that Emily is a little better this evening, but it is difficult to ascertain this. She is a real stoic in illness: she neither seeks nor will accept sympathy. To put any questions, to offer any aid, is to annoy; she will not yield a step before pain or sickness till forced; not one of her ordinary avocations will she voluntarily renounce. You must look on and see her do what she is unfit to do, and not dare to say a word—a painful necessity for those to whom her health and existence are as precious as the life in their veins. When she is ill there seems to be no sunshine in the world for me. The tie of sister is near and dear indeed, and I

think a certain harshness in her powerful and peculiar character only makes me cling to her more. But this is all family egotism (so to speak)—excuse it, and, above all, never allude to it, or to the name Emily, when you write to me. I do not always show your letters, but I never withhold them when they are inquired after." [1]

Then we have the remarkable passage in a further letter to Mr. Williams:—

"The *North American Review* is worth reading; there is no mincing the matter there. What a bad set the Bells must be! What appalling books they write! To-day, as Emily appeared a little easier, I thought the *Review* would amuse her, so I read it aloud to her and Anne. As I sat between them at our quiet but now somewhat melancholy fireside, I studied the two ferocious authors. Ellis, the 'man of uncommon talents, but dogged, brutal, and morose,' sat leaning back in his easy chair drawing his impeded breath as he best could, and looking, alas! piteously pale and wasted; it is not his wont to laugh, but he smiled half-amused

[1] *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle.*

and half in scorn as he listened. Acton was sewing, no emotion ever stirs him to loquacity, so he only smiled too, dropping at the same time a single word of calm amazement to hear his character so darkly portrayed. I wonder what the reviewer would have thought of his own sagacity could he have beheld the pair as I did. Vainly, too, might he have looked round for the masculine partner in the firm of 'Bell & Co.' How I laugh in my sleeve when I read the solemn assertions that *Jane Eyre* was written in partnership, and that it 'bears the marks of more than one mind and one sex.'

"The wise critics would certainly sink a degree in their own estimation if they knew that yours or Mr. Smith's was the first masculine hand that touched the MS. of *Jane Eyre,* and that till you or he read it no masculine eye had scanned a line of its contents, no masculine ear heard a phrase from its pages. However, the view they take of the matter rather pleases me than otherwise. If they like, I am not unwilling they should think a dozen ladies and gentlemen aided at the compilation of the book. Strange patchwork it must seem to them

—this chapter being penned by Mr., and that by Miss or Mrs. Bell; that character or scene being delineated by the husband, that other by the wife! The gentleman, of course, doing the rough work, the lady getting up the finer parts. I admire the idea vastly."

And the final scene in a letter written December 25, 1848. Emily having died on the 19th:—

"Emily is nowhere here now, her wasted mortal remains are taken out of the house. We have laid her cherished head under the church aisle beside my mother's, my two sisters'—dead long ago—and my poor, hapless brother's. But a small remnant of the race is left—so my poor father thinks.

"Well, the loss is ours, not hers, and some sad comfort I take, as I hear the wind blow and feel the cutting keenness of the frost, in knowing that the elements bring her no more suffering; their severity cannot reach her grave; her fever is quieted. her restlessness soothed, her deep, hollow cough is hushed for ever; we do not hear it in the night nor listen for it in the morning; we have not the con-

flict of the strangely strong spirit and the fragile frame before us—relentless conflict—once seen, never to be forgotten. A dreary calm reigns round us, in the midst of which we seek resignation.

"I will not now ask why Emily was torn from us in the fullness of our attachment, rooted up in the prime of her own days, in the promise of her powers; why her existence now lies like a field of green corn trodden down, like a tree in full bearing struck at the root. I will only say, sweet is rest after labour and calm after tempest, and repeat again and again that Emily knows that now." [1]

To add anything to these words of Charlotte Brontë's would be little less than sacrilege. Emily died young, but she left behind her some imperishable poems and an equally imperishable novel, of which Mr. Swinburne has written: "It may be true that not many will ever take it to their hearts; it is certain that those who do like it will like nothing very much better in the whole world of poetry or prose."

[1] Letter to Mr. W. S. Williams in *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle.*

CHAPTER XII

ANNE BRONTË

THOSE who write or talk as if books live only by their intrinsic merits, ignore the fact that a very slight accident may often cause the survival of a work of very moderate power. There cannot be a doubt, for example, but that the novels of Anne Brontë would scarcely have maintained their place had their author been an isolated writer unsupported by the environment that Mrs. Gaskell's biography has made familiar to us all. Such books as *Jane Eyre* and *Villette, Shirley* and *Wuthering Heights* must in any case have been certain of a permanent place in literature, but Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* would almost undoubtedly have died. There seems, if we examine them carefully, less reason for their survival than for the works of Mrs. Marsh and Miss Kavanagh, books that had a very

great vogue in the " forties " and " fifties." Let us grant then that Anne Brontë's stories are not great books; they nevertheless attract us by virtue of their autobiographical character, and they make pleasant unpretentious reading even to-day. *Agnes Grey,* the first of them, was, as we have seen, bound up with *Wuthering Heights,* and such is the frequent futility of contemporary criticism that it is not surprising that many reviewers found it preferable to the titanic story that accompanied it. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* had indeed one very frank critic who loved its author. It was pronounced " scarcely worth republication " by Anne's devoted sister Charlotte when she wrote a preface to a new edition of it. Yet such is the " glamour " of the Brontës, that edition after edition of the book has been issued and sold in our time, the exhaustion of the copyright forty-two years after first publication having given occasion for at least four or five new issues by separate publishers. Here then it is clearly imperative to recognize the potency of the personal element in literature.

Both the novels of Anne Brontë are transcripts

of the life she knew and little more. This is the factor that differentiates the man or woman of genius from the merely average writer. Anne was not capable of transmuting experience through that wonderful crucible that produces the highest truth of literature, that subtle presentation which carries conviction to our souls and makes us say—here is great art. She had no genius, no passion. The photographic quality that she possessed has, however, its value. We go to Anne Brontë more readily than to Charlotte and Emily for a picture of what life was like for a nursery governess in the "forties," and we find her pictures in *Agnes Grey* thoroughly interesting in consequence; we may go to her also for a very clear impression of the family circle at Haworth, and of the life she saw and heard of outside the rectory walls, when we read *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* If there is little imagination, there is at least a clear narrative of her brother's escapades as far as she had comprehended them, adding thereto, as she doubtless did, sundry episodes in the lives of others that scandal had conveyed to her.

But it is scarcely necessary to take the novels of Anne Brontë too seriously, even were criticism the province of this little biography, which it is not. It suffices that she was a softening, benign atmosphere in a house where father, aunt and elder sisters, whatever their other fine qualities, would seem to have lacked softness and benignity. The father was ever an egoist, the aunt the embodiment of kindness, but severe, Charlotte, as we know, was strenuous, and Emily profoundly melancholy. But Mr. Nicholls, writing fifty years after her death, recalled the " gentle " Anne; and that influence of gentleness must have run like a silken cord through the somewhat tumultuous lives of the two clever sisters, both of whom had hearts ever aflame, imaginations ever alert for action outside the narrow walls of that simple prosaic home.

Emily, we are told, was inseparable from Anne in the years during which the elder sister Charlotte seemed to lean upon some friend from the outer world—Ellen Nussey, Mary Taylor, or Laetitia Wheelwright. Charlotte had a gift for friendship which stood her in good stead when she found her-

self alone in the world. Her sisters had not this gift, and were thrown back upon one another's company.

Anne Brontë, as we have seen, was carried as a baby from Thornton to Haworth while her mother's life was ebbing away. Perhaps this was why she was her aunt's favourite, always by her side in her earliest years. Later she and Emily were inseparable. We know next to nothing of Anne's experiences as governess, first with Mrs. Ingram of Blake Hall, and next with Mrs. Robinson at Thorpe Green. Indeed it is only from Charlotte's letters that we learn anything of material importance concerning Anne, although Miss Nussey writes of the youngest sister as so much the "prettiest" of the three, with "light brown hair, violet blue eyes and pencilled eyebrows, and an almost transparent complexion." One would have liked to have heard Anne's version of that sordid drama at Thorpe Green, where Branwell was, or professed to be, carrying on a flirtation with the mistress of the house. Anne must have seen something to vex her innocent soul, or she would on her

return to Haworth have insisted that Branwell's "love story" was purely imaginary. It was the attitude of Anne on this subject that persuaded Mr. Nicholls, with whom I discussed the question, that Branwell was not entirely to blame, that there had at least been some indiscreet flirtation, calculated to disarrange further an already ill-balanced mind.

Writing in her diary in July, 1845, Anne says, recalling what she had written four years earlier:—

"How many things have happened since it was written—some pleasant, some far otherwise. Yet I was then at Thorpe Green, and now I am only just escaped from it. I was wishing to leave it then, and if I had known that I had four years longer to stay how wretched I should have been; but during my stay I have had some very unpleasant and undreamt-of experience of human nature. Others have seen more changes. Charlotte has left Mr. White's and been twice to Brussels, where she stayed each time nearly a year. Emily has been there too, and stayed nearly a year. Branwell has

left Luddendenfoot, and been a tutor at Thorpe Green, and had much tribulation and ill health. He was very ill on Thursday, but he went with John Brown to Liverpool, where he now is, I suppose; and we hope he will be better and do better in future. This is a dismal, cloudy, wet evening. We have had so far a very cold wet summer. Charlotte has lately been to Hathersage, in Derbyshire, on a visit of three weeks to Ellen Nussey. She is now sitting sewing in the dining-room. Emily is ironing upstairs. I am sitting in the dining-room in the rocking-chair before the fire with my feet on the fender. Papa is in the parlour. Tabby and Martha are, I think, in the kitchen. Keeper and Flossy are, I do not know where. Little Dick is hopping in his cage. When the last paper was written we were thinking of setting up a school. The scheme has been dropped, and long after taken up again and dropped again because we could not get pupils. Charlotte is thinking about getting another situation. She wishes to go to Paris. Will she go? She has let Flossy in, by-the-by, and she is now lying on the sofa. Emily is en-

gaged in writing the Emperor Julius's life. She has read some of it, and I want very much to hear the rest. She is writing some poetry, too. I wonder what it is about? I have begun the third volume of *Passages in the Life of an Individual.* I wish I had finished it. This afternoon I began to set about making my grey figured silk frock that was dyed at Keighley. What sort of a hand shall I make of it?" [1]

This is but a fragment of the published diary, but it contains many points of interest. The " very unpleasant and undreamt-of experience of human nature " must have referred to the trouble between her brother and the mother of her pupils. The speculation as to Charlotte's going to Paris is noteworthy. Instead of that, Charlotte and her sisters published poems and novels, with the result that we all know. The *Poems* appeared the following year, *Jane Eyre* in October, 1847, and *Agnes Grey* in December. The two editions of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* appeared in 1848, the year that Branwell and Emily died, and Anne followed her

[1] *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle.*

brother and sister in 1849. As we have traced Emily's pathway to the grave, so we may trace Anne's in her sister's melancholy letters:—

"Anne and I sit alone and in seclusion as you fancy us, but we do not study. Anne cannot study now, she can scarcely read; she occupies Emily's chair; she does not get well. A week ago we sent for a medical man of skill and experience from Leeds to see her. He examined her with the stethoscope. His report I forbear to dwell on for the present—even skilful physicians have often been mistaken in their conjectures.

"My first impulse was to hasten her away to a warmer climate, but this was forbidden: she must not travel; she is not to stir from the house this winter; the temperature of her room is to be kept constantly equal.

"When we lost Emily I thought we had drained the very dregs of our cup of trial, but now when I hear Anne cough as Emily coughed, I tremble lest there should be exquisite bitterness yet to taste. However, I must not look forwards, nor must I look backwards. Too often I feel like one cross-

ing an abyss on a narrow plank—a glance round might quite unnerve.

"Anne is very patient in her illness, as patient as Emily was unflinching. I recall one sister and look at the other with a sort of reverence as well as affection—under the test of suffering—neither has faltered.

"Anne continues a little better—the mild weather suits her. At times I hear the renewal of hope's whisper, but I dare not listen too fondly; she deceived me cruelly before. A sudden change to cold would be the test. I dread such change, but must not anticipate. Spring lies before us, and then summer—surely we may hope a little!"

But hope was slight indeed, as a letter to Ellen Nussey, describing a projected visit to Scarborough, indicated. Anne had been to Scarborough three or four times during her governess days, and wished to see the place again. After stating that they had secured rooms on the cliffs with a sea view, she continues:—

"If Anne is to get any good she must have every advantage. Miss Outhwaite, her godmoth-

er, left her in her will a legacy of £200, and she cannot employ her money better than in obtaining what may prolong existence, if it does not restore health. We hope to leave home on the 23rd, and I think it will be advisable to rest at York, and stay all night there. I hope this arrangement will suit you. We reckon on your society, dear Ellen, as a real privilege and pleasure. We shall take little luggage, and shall have to buy bonnets and dresses and several other things either at York or Scarboro'; which place do you think would be best? Oh, if it would please God to strengthen and revive Anne, how happy we might be together! His will, however, must be done, and if she is not to recover, it remains to pray for strength and patience."

Then we have a letter from Scarborough to Mr. Smith Williams:—

"I am thankful to say we reached our destination safely, having rested one night at York. We found assistance wherever we needed it; there was always an arm ready to do for my sister what I was not quite strong enough to do: lift her in and out of the carriage, carry her across the line, etc.

"It made her happy to see both York and its Minster, and Scarboro' and its bay once more. There is yet no revival of bodily strength—I fear indeed the slow ebb continues. People who see her tell me I must not expect her to last long—but it is something to cheer her mind.

"Our lodgings are pleasant. As Anne sits at the window she can look down on the sea, which this morning is calm as glass. She says if she could breathe more freely she would be comfortable at this moment—but she cannot breathe freely.

"My friend Ellen is with us. I find her presence a solace. She is a calm, steady girl—not brilliant, but good and true. She suits and has always suited me well. I like her, with her phlegm, repose, sense, and sincerity, better than I should like the most talented without these qualifications."

And then the scene closes with this last little note, written to her friend Mr. Williams:—

"MY DEAR SIR,—My poor sister is taken quietly home at last. She died on Monday. With almost her last breath she said she was happy, and

thanked God that death was come, and come so gently. I did not think it would be so soon."

Anne Brontë is buried in Scarborough Churchyard, where the inscription on her tomb runs as follows:—

"Here lie the remains of Anne Brontë, daughter of the Rev. P. Brontë, Incumbent of Haworth, Yorkshire. She died, aged 28, May 28th, 1849."

She also left behind her some "last verses," which have found their way into the hymnologies of many of the Churches:—

I hoped that with the brave and strong
  My portioned task may lie,
To toil amid the busy throng
  With purpose pure and high.

CHAPTER XIII

JANE EYRE

CHARLOTTE BRONTË was thirty-one years and six months old when *Jane Eyre* was published. The passing of her first novel from publisher to publisher has already been noted. In a fortunate hour the manuscript of *The Professor* fell into the hands of Mr. Smith Williams the "reader" to Smith, Elder & Co. Mr. Williams, who was born in 1800 and died in 1875, possessed a genuine literary faculty. He was the brother-in-law of Charles Wells, the author of *Joseph and his Brethren.* When Keats left England for an early grave in Rome it was Mr. Williams who saw him off. Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Thackeray and Ruskin valued highly his judgment. He compiled a volume of *Selections* from Mr. Ruskin's writings which is still much prized by the curious. The publisher's "reader" or book-taster is but human, and often

makes mistakes. Certainly the five readers of the five publishing houses which sent back *The Professor* with curt refusals had reasons for regretting their mistake in this instance—even from a merely commercial point of view,[1] and perhaps more from the point of view of glory.

Mr. Williams recognized the undoubted ability of *The Professor*, but those were the days when the three-volumed novel was a fetish. We have seen the way in which Mr. Newby bound up *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* in order to make them look like a single three-volumed book. By no possibility could *The Professor* have been made to stretch to more than two volumes. Besides this, although Mr. Williams liked it another influential member of the staff, Mr. James Taylor, did not, and after both had reported to their "chief,"

[1] The total sum paid for the entire copyright of Charlotte Brontë's four novels was £1,750—£500 each for *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*, and £250 for *The Professor*. In the year 1860—twelve years after the publication of *Jane Eyre*—the publishers admitted to having made a clear profit of £10,000. Mr. George Smith was once offered £500 for the manuscript of *Jane Eyre*.

Mr. George Smith, the letter went forth from the office in Cornhill which was to bring yet another refusal to the mysterious but ever persevering Mr. Currer Bell at Haworth. But Currer Bell afterwards declared in print that this refusal was "couched in language so delicate, reasonable and courteous, as to be more cheering than some acceptances." It assigned a lack of varied interest in the tale as well as the length as the cause of rejection, therefore Currer Bell replied that he had nearly completed a novel in three volumes, and this Mr. Williams asked to see.

On August 24, 1847, the manuscript of *Jane Eyre* was sent to Cornhill, and then there was no hesitation. The author was reading proof sheets during September, and in the middle of October the book was published. The critics were enthusiastic, the public more so. "The most extraordinary production that has issued from the press for years," said the *Weekly Chronicle*. "Decidedly the best novel of the season," said the *Westminster Review*. In looking through these old reviews one is struck by their judgment and insight. If

there was good creative work produced in the "forties" and "fifties," there was also good criticism. Miss Brontë enjoyed to the full the burst of sympathetic and appreciative criticism that came to her. Perhaps the critique that delighted her most was one by Eugène Forcade in the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* the one that gave her actual and indeed deep-rooted pain the article by Miss Rigby in the *Quarterly Review.* "The subtle-thoughted, keen-eyed, quick-feeling Frenchman" is her judgment of Forcade, and his notice of *Jane Eyre* is "the most acceptable to the author of any that has yet appeared."[1] As for the review of *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly,* it is not too much to say that it almost made Charlotte Brontë repent its authorship. Yet Miss Rigby wrote with no desire to be other than fair. She was a staunch Conservative, and the book seemed to her to be wildly Radical. She believed the author to be a man—as her editor did[2]—for in her world no woman was so ignorant

[1] Letter to W. S. Williams, November 16, 1848.

[2] Lockhart, her editor, writes as follows to his contributor, Miss Rigby, after he had received the first part of her review:—"I know nothing of the writers, but the common rumour is that

of the daintier aspects of life: the fitting garment for this or that occasion, the delicacies of refined cookery! How could Miss Rigby have guessed that it was the timid, sensitive daughter of a country clergyman, herself a warm adherent of Church and State, who had written this extraordinary book! The author she thought was clearly a man, and if it had been a man the sentence that so pained Miss Brontë—the suggestion that if the author were a woman it must be one "who had forfeited the society of her sex"—would have fallen harmless. The sentence was not more cruelly personal than every author was liable to suffer from in those days. A certain great historian did not, we may

they are brothers of the weaving order in some Lancashire town. At first it was generally said Currer was a lady, and Mayfair circumstantializes by making her the *chere amie* of Mr. Thackeray. But your skill in "dress" settles the question of sex. I think, however, some women must have assisted in the school scenes of *Jane Eyre*, which have a striking air of truthfulness to me. I should say you might as well glance at the novels by Acton and Ellis Bell—*Wuthering Heights* is one of them. If you have any friend about Manchester, it would, I suppose, be easy to learn accurately as to the position of these men."—*Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, edited by her nephew, Charles Eastlake Smith, 1895.

be sure, enjoy being called "Mr. Babbletongue Macaulay" by *The Times*. In any case, many compensations for a young writer might have been found in the *Quarterly* article had not the author criticized been the sensitive Charlotte Brontë. The "equal popularity" of *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair* is referred to, and the reviewer admits that the book is "remarkable." It is true that she adds that "we have no remembrance of another containing such undoubted power with such horrid taste." Certainly judged by the standards—the Conservative standards—of those days, when the majority of well-nurtured women were brought up on strictly conventional lines, the taste of the book was bound to be called in question, and the critic who did so was not necessarily a "nauseous hypocrite," as Mr. Augustine Birrell rather extravagantly calls her. A generation that has been brought up upon "sex" novels has other standards of taste. It was its very unconventionality which made the book so popular sixty years since. What is it that makes the book's appeal to us to-day?

To those who take no account of the qualities of style, imagination and "point of view" in literature, *Jane Eyre* would now make no appeal. To such, *Hamlet* would make no appeal. Is not the whole story of the murdered king, the son who feigns madness to revenge his father's murder, all set down for us in Saxo Grammaticus, the Danish chronicler? In the actual incidents, in the plot of *Jane Eyre* there is but little originality. It is called "an autobiography," and in one sense it is, as are all Miss Brontë's books, a very detailed autobiography of the writer—of her reading life as well as of her actual life. The period during which Jane Eyre was at Lowood School was but a reflection of Charlotte Brontë's actual experiences at Cowan Bridge, at any rate of her idea of the school as it came back to her after an interval of more than twenty years.

It is quite clear that her wonderful memory enabled her to reproduce much of that child life of hers, in a manner for the accuracy of which credit has scarcely been given until quite recently. A student of the Brontë story, Mr. Angus Mackay,

has however unearthed some of the actual literary efforts of the Reverend Carus Wilson, the prototype of Mr. Brocklehurst.[1] This critic has been studying the writings of Mr. Wilson, particularly certain books for the young by him, which Charlotte Brontë could never have seen. There was one called *Youthful Memoirs*, published in 1828, full of deathbed scenes of little children, all of whom were made to be singularly in love with death. One little boy of three or four years of age, for example, when asked whether he would choose death or life, replied, "Death for me. I am fonder of death." Mr. Brocklehurst says to Jane Eyre, "Children younger than you die daily. I buried a little child five years old only a day or two since, a good little child, whose soul is now in Heaven." Mr. Wilson's *Youthful Memoirs* is full of the deathbeds of these good little children. He says to Jane Eyre, "You have a wicked heart, and you must pray God to change it, to give you a new and clean heart, to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

[1] Mr. J. Angus Mackay, in the *Bookman*.

Almost these exact words occur in three of the stories; one of the little girls here says to a naughty companion that "she must humble her pride and pray to God, and He would be sure to take away her heart of stone and give her a heart of flesh." Mr. Brocklehurst says, "I have a little boy younger than you who knows six psalms by heart." There are a number of such little boys in *Youthful Memoirs*. At the close of the interview with Jane Eyre, Mr. Brocklehurst gives her a tract entitled "The Child's Guide; containing an account of the awfully sudden Death of Martha G., a naughty child addicted to falsehood." One of Mr. Wilson's little stories is actually entitled *An Awful History*. Altogether, the student of this unsavoury literature, Mr. Angus Mackay, has proved up to the hilt, long after the controversy is dead and buried, that Miss Brontë's description of the mental attitude of Mr. Carus Wilson was substantially accurate, however much she may have exaggerated the demerits of the place itself; and in spite of the fact that the original of the heroic Miss Temple, a Mrs.

Harben, would seem to have repudiated the description altogether.

It was the same with Miss Brontë's governess life, a hundred disagreeable incidents of which are reflected in Jane Eyre's experiences of Mrs. Reed. We know that a youthful Sidgwick threw a Bible at Miss Brontë on one occasion, as John Reed threw a copy of Bewick's *Birds* at Jane Eyre. It is little to the point that Mrs. Sidgwick may have been one of the kindest and best of women. Miss Brontë found her insufferable. Well-nigh every place and every person in the history of *Jane Eyre* has been identified with a prototype in the life story of Charlotte Brontë. In her letters Miss Brontë writes of the dark face, the sardonic humour, the masterful manner of M. Paul Héger; in her book she attributes these qualities to Fairfax Rochester. The author spends three weeks at Hathersage in Derbyshire, and to that neighbourhood she turns for much of the scenery of her novel. Morton, in Jane Eyre, is easily identified with Hathersage; the one is ten miles from "S——," the other twenty miles from Sheffield.

All the villagers are engaged in the manufacture of needles, as are those of Hathersage to-day. Thornfield Hall, the seat of Mr. Rochester, has been easily identified with Norton Conyers near Ripon, which was in Miss Brontë's day the seat of Mr. Greenwood, the father of Mrs. Sidgwick. Miss Brontë visited the house when staying with her pupils at Swarcliffe, Mr. Greenwood's summer residence. Mr. Rochester's other house, where Jane Eyre found him in his blindness, Ferndean Manor, is Wycollar Hall near Colne, a hall which is now a ruin, but which has attached to it the story of a madwoman having set it on fire; and also the tradition that the original owner, Squire Cunliffe, had some of the traits associated with Rochester. Moor House, where the Rivers family lived, has been identified with Moor Seats near Hathersage; Gateshead Hall, where Mrs. Reed lived, has been identified with Stonegappe near Skipton, where, as we have seen, Charlotte Brontë was governess to the Sidgwicks. So we might go on for every village and every house mentioned in the novel. As it is with place-names, so it is

with persons. For the raw material of her book Miss Brontë went to material available to all the world. Some time ago there appeared in the *Saturday Review* a letter calling attention to a little book entitled *Gleanings in Craven; or, The Tourists' Guide.* In this book may be found the names of Sir Ingram Clifford, of Skipton Castle; of Miss Richardson Currer, of Eshton Hall; and many other names and places familiar to every resident in the West Riding of Yorkshire. I do not for a moment doubt but that Miss Brontë had read this little guide-book, a very discursive and ineffective production, although for the name of Ingram she need not have gone further than to the family doctor to Haworth Parsonage, Dr. Ingram. To describe *Gleanings in Craven* as a "key" to *Jane Eyre* is, however, to ignore any number of other "keys" provided by the long years of apprenticeship to novel-writing. I am not disinclined to think indeed that whereas she had often heard of Miss Currer, the name of Bell may really have been suggested to her by the little book on Craven, where there is a reference to "the celebrated

lawyer and one of his late Majesty's Counsels, the late John Bell, Esqr." It has been stated that she took the name of Bell from the second name of Mr. Arthur Bell Nicholls, who was afterwards to become her husband; but I have Mr. Nicholls's assurance that this was not the case.

I have said that there are many "keys" to *Jane Eyre*. One may find, for example, in Defoe's *Moll Flanders*—a book which Miss Brontë had of course read—a parallel incident to that where Jane hears the voice of Rochester calling her, although he is many miles away.

Moll calls in distress to Jemmy, her "Lancashire husband," and Jemmy hears the cry. Moll, it will be remembered, burst into a fit of crying, calling him by his name, "O Jemmy! come back, come back." The husband returned and told her that twelve miles off in Delamere Forest he had heard her calling to him aloud, and that he had heard her voice calling "O Jemmy! O Jemmy! come back, come back." This is not the only point in common between *Moll Flanders* and *Jane Eyre*, because Moll has a lover at Bath who has a "distem-

pered," insane wife, and begs Moll not to let that be a bar to a marriage; a little later, she is wooed by a bank clerk whose wife is unfaithful, and this man begs Moll Flanders to marry him without waiting for his divorce. Such parallels have a certain literary interest, although they in no way reflect upon the essential originality of *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Brontë's love of the preternatural would have induced her to remember that incident in *Moll Flanders*, although Mrs. Gaskell records that Miss Brontë once referring to Jane hearing Rochester's voice from a distance of many miles, replied, "But, it is a true thing; it really happened!" Did she mean by that, that it happened in Defoe's apparently true narrative, or that it came within her experience? It is quite possible that it did come within her experience, and in any case she had probably forgotten her reading of *Moll Flanders* when she sat down to write *Jane Eyre*.

Certainly she must have read from the Keighley Library *A Sicilian Romance*, by Mrs. Radcliffe, where it will be remembered Count Mazzini shuts

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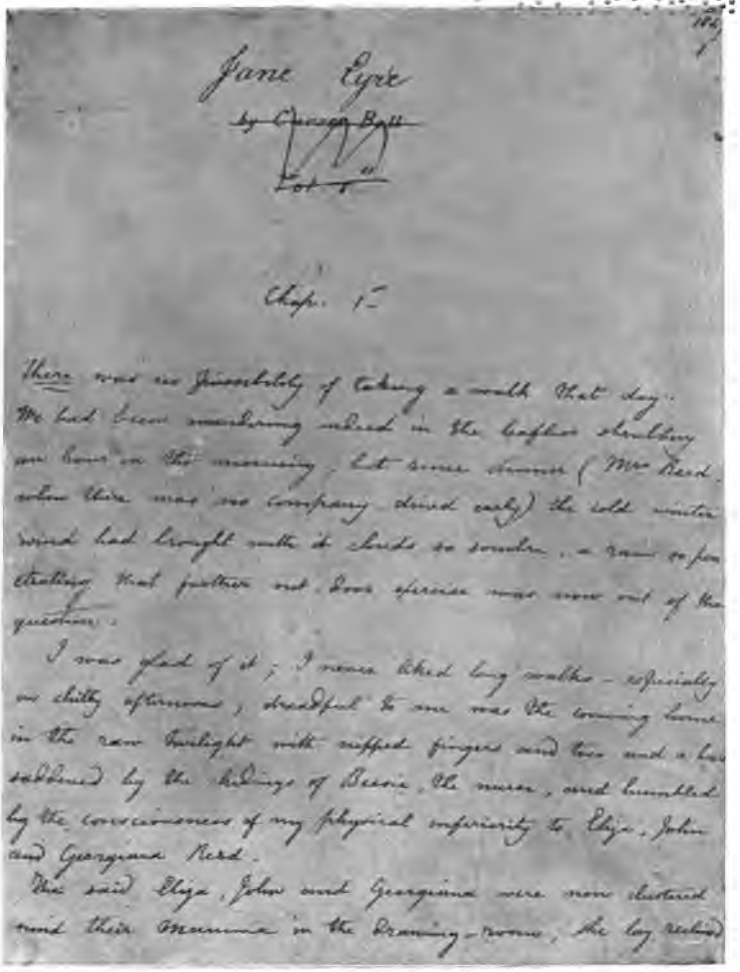

Jane Eyre

~~by Cuvier Bell~~

~~Lot 1~~

Chap. 1

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering indeed in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning, but since dinner (Mrs Reed, when there was no company dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, a rain so penetrating that further out door exercise was now out of the question.

I was glad of it; I never liked long walks – especially on chilly afternoons, dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight with nipped fingers and toes and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John and Georgiana were now clustered round their Mamma in the Drawing-room, she lay reclined

The first page of the Manuscript of Jane Eyre

The Manuscript is in the possession of the publishers, Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. Mr. George Smith refused £500 for this MS., the actual sum paid for the original novel

up his wife in a castle for fifteen years, although the fact is unknown to the rest of the inhabitants, who periodically hear noises and see strange things. Miss Brontë refers to Ann Radcliffe in *Shirley*, where Rose Yorke may be found reading *The Italian*. In addition to these one acute critic [1] has found traces of Richardson's *Pamela* and Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook*.

The real power of *Jane Eyre* is quite unaffected by such small points as these, or even the, to me, more interesting point as to the original of St. John Rivers, one of the most striking characters in the book. Mrs. Gaskell started the idea that Rivers was intended for Mr. Henry Nussey, a clergyman of the Church of England, who held the living of Hathersage for a time, and was the brother of Charlotte Brontë's great friend, Ellen Nussey. Mr. Nussey, we know, offered marriage to Charlotte Brontë, influenced it would seem more by a keen desire for a housekeeper who would look after the schools and attend to the coal and blanket funds, than from any deep-seated af-

[1] Dr. Robertson Nicoll in his *Introduction* to *Jane Eyre*.

the Lord be done." "C. B.," of course, is Charlotte Brontë, and some might find satisfaction in the fact that the marriage which this matter-of-fact individual attained to a very few months later should have turned out unhappily. In Mr. Nussey, however, we have not in the least Charlotte Brontë's creation, St. John Rivers. There are a few references to missionary work in Mr. Nussey's diary, but on the whole it is the diary of a dull, uninspired person, with not sufficient brains to be a high-souled fanatic; and it is a high-souled fanatic that Miss Brontë depicts in her book. That is why I am inclined to think that the real prototype of Rivers existed for her not in life but in literature; that she had read from the Keighley Library Sargent's *Memoir of Henry Martyn*, that devoted missionary from Cornwall, of whom her aunt must have constantly spoken to her, and her father also, for he was practically contemporaneous with him at St. John's College, Cambridge, a fact which probably led her to give Rivers his Christian name of St. John. It was Charles Simeon again, her father's favourite

preacher, who led Martyn to become a missionary. Martyn, it will be remembered, translated the New Testament into Hindustani. There are points also in the relations with Miss Lydia Grenfell, whom he had hoped to take back with him to India when he died of the plague, that unquestionably recall St. John Rivers. Martyn has been described by Sir James Stephen as "the one heroic name which adorns the Church of England from the days of Queen Elizabeth to our own." [1]

* * * * * *

We may readily thrust aside, however, all these inquiries as to "keys" to *Jane Eyre*, and go to the real heart of the book, which is quite independent of plot and of prototype. It is in reality as original a novel as was ever submitted to the judgment of the reading public. Here indeed was a work of extraordinary power. In the first place, the writer had a style, a vigorous, forcible style; a style full of picturesque phraseology, characterized by that intense sincerity which is ever one of

[1] Curiously enough, Henry Martyn has been made the hero of a novel called *Her Title of Honour*, published in 1871 by Holm Lee.

the greatest things in literature. No other poet has better described the impressions made upon his mind by the sky, the air, the sea. "Mistress of some of the most great and simple prose of all this century" is the criticism of a distinguished woman critic of our day upon the work.[1] One might make an anthology of the fine passages from her four books, as for example:—

"I looked at my love; it shivered in my heart like a suffering child in a cold cradle."

* * * * * *

"To see what a heavy lid day slowly lifted, what a wan glance she flung upon the hills, you would have thought the sun's fire quenched in last night's floods."

* * * * * *

"Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder, the tremor of whose plumes was storm."

* * * * * *

"The night is not calm; the equinox still struggles in its storms. The wild rains of the day are

[1] Alice Meynell, in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, May 24, 1899.

abated; the great single cloud disparts, and rolls away from Heaven, not passing and leaving a sea of sapphire, but tossing buoyant before a continued, long-sounding, high-rushing moonlight tempest. . . . No Endymion will watch for his goddess to-night: there are no flocks on the mountains."

* * * * * *

But style alone does not add to the permanent forces of literature. It is but that quality added to the passionate sincerity of the writer that will make each succeeding generation read *Jane Eyre*, for here we have a book in which are crowded all the deepest experiences of the human soul, a frank courageous attitude upon life, and death, and duty. Charlotte Brontë had read multitudes of books, and she had been an observer of the humanity around her, in that little world of rough, rude men and commonplace women. To her had come dreams of a wider, freer life, of profound love, of heroic sacrifice. She had thought out all the possibilities of a great passion in which love

was king. In her own life she was the most self-suppressed of human beings. She saw her debased brother and her much-loved sisters taken from her and buried within a stone's throw of the house which was her home. Yet she clung to that home, and to the father who had so peremptorily attempted to prevent her marriage: finally she married to retain to her father the occupancy of the melancholy house which she might reasonably have hated and desired to quit for ever. A dull, prosaic life she had mapped out for herself at the call of duty; but meanwhile her imagination ran riot, and love, passionate love, a reckless throwing off of conventions, was a part of her dreams, the imparting of which was to throw English society into a fever of interest. After the current novels of her day, *Jane Eyre* was a model of outspokenness, a veritable volcano. No wonder Miss Rigby said hard things about it, things which caused critics who wrote a generation later to be indignant. But really the little Jane was upsetting the conventional standards of her day, by sitting on Rochester's knees. What would another Jane who wrote a

generation earlier have said? The fair Elizabeth Bennet of Miss Austen's imagination could never have caught the wealthy Mr. Darcy by such means. But Charlotte Brontë had been fed on strong literary food. She had been allowed to "browse" in a library pretty indiscriminately, a thing which did not often happen to young girls in the first half of last century. The books that she obtained from Keighley must have included the works of such essentially frank writers as Swift and Defoe. Then, again, in her own home there was doubtless not too much discrimination so far as the men were concerned as to the borderline. Her father was, after all, a peasant, and in the habit of calling a spade a spade. If we may judge from some of the letters unpublished and unpublishable of the brother, Branwell Brontë, we see also that his mind was of essentially coarse fibre. Altogether, it is not in the least difficult to comprehend that Miss Brontë was able to take the attitude she did, and to write with a frankness which was somewhat new in her day and generation. As a matter of fact, the criticism of the

Quarterly[1] was most to be regretted, in that it frightened her, and tended to make her conventional. The bad influences of this criticism is traceable in *Shirley*, which would otherwise probably have been a very much greater book than it actually is.

[1] The article is called *Vanity Fair, Jane Eyre, and Governesses*, and appeared in the *Quarterly* for December, 1848.

CHAPTER XIV

SHIRLEY

In taking up a copy of Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* we find ourselves in an atmosphere more easy of interpretation than that of any other book written by the three sisters. Birstall in Yorkshire, near Batley, is the real centre of the story; not very far away you may come to Oakwell Hall, the "Fieldhead" where Shirley lived, and within easy reach also the Red House at Gomersall, known in the book as "Briarmains," where the family of Yorke lived. The school teacher, Miss Wooler, as Mrs. Gaskell tells us in detail, was in the habit of relating her memories of the great mill riots at the beginning of the century. The attack on Hollow's Mill in the book is but a picturesque record of an actual event in April, 1812,[1] when an

[1] Her original idea was to call her story *Hollow's Mill* and not *Shirley*.

assault by some hundreds of starving cloth-dressers, armed with pistols, hatchets and bludgeons, was made upon the factory of Mr. Cartwright at Rawfolds, between Huddersfield and Leeds. Mr. Cartwright, like Mr. Moore, had foreign blood in his veins, dark eyes and complexion; and Mr. Cartwright's successful defence of his mill was but retold in picturesque form in *Shirley*. Then in Mr. Helstone we have the prototype of a Mr. Hammond Roberson of Heald's Hall, who built a handsome church at Liversedge —a fine old Tory who was intimate with Cartwright, and armed himself and his household in his defence. It is he of whom it is told in *Shirley* that he put the sweetheart of one of his servants under the pump; "Fanny" is the servant in *Shirley;* it is "Betty" in Mrs. Gaskell's relation of the actual circumstance. Almost every incident in the book, as for example the meeting of the rival Dissenting and Church of England schools in a narrow lane, has its counterpart in the tradition or the actual experiences of Charlotte Brontë's life in her Yorkshire home.

Equally plain is the presentation of the various characters, not only of Matthew Helstone as we have seen, and Mr. Cartwright, but far more sharply defined are the three curates and the Yorke family. Mr. Donne, the curate of Whinbury, for example, has been easily identified as Mr. Grant of Oxenhope; Mr. Malone, the curate of Briarfield, as Mr. Smith of Haworth; while Mr. Sweeting, the curate of Nunnerley, was Mr. Bradley of Oakworth—the only one of the three who is still living.[1] The interesting Mr. Yorke who lived

[1] "The very curates, poor fellows! show no resentment," says Miss Brontë in one of her letters, "each characteristically finds solace for his own wounds in crowing over his brethren. Mr. Donne was, at first, a little disturbed; for a week or two he was in disquietude, but he is now soothed down; only yesterday I had the pleasure of making him a comfortable cup of tea, and seeing him sip it with revived complacency. It is a curious fact that since he read *Shirley*, he has come to the house oftener than ever, and been remarkably meek and assiduous to please. Some people's natures are veritable enigmas; I quite expected to have had one good scene at least with him; but as yet nothing of the sort has occurred."

Mr. Donne or Joseph Brett Grant was the master of the Grammar School at the time. He became curate and afterwards vicar of Oxenhope, where he died immensely esteemed a quarter of a century later. Peter Augustus Malone, who was James William Smith in real life, was for two years curate

at Briarmains was Mr. Joshua Taylor, and his daughters Mary Taylor and Martha Taylor, are presented respectively as Rose and Jessie Yorke. Mrs. Pryor is Miss Margaret Wooler. As for the heroine, Shirley, Mrs. Gaskell recalls a

to Mr. Brontë at Haworth. He had graduated at Trinity College, Dublin, and after a two years' curacy at Haworth he became curate of the neighbouring parish of Keighley. In 1847, his family having suffered frightfully from the Irish famine, he determined to try and build up a home for them in America, and sailed for Canada. The last that was heard of him was from Minnesota, where he was cutting down trees for lumbermen; and he probably perished on his way to the goldfields of California.*

David Sweeting, the third curate, was the Rev. James Chesterton Bradley (who had been educated at Queen's College, Oxford), from the neighbouring parish of Oakworth, to which he had been curate since 1845. He went in 1847 to All Saints', Paddington; in 1856 he went to Corfe Castle, Dorset, and in 1863 he became rector of Sutton-under-Brayles, Warwickshire, a living which he held until 1904 when he retired; and is still living at an advanced age at Richmond, Surrey. Mr. Bradley has always found great pleasure in recalling the fact that he was the prototype of Mr. Sweeting in *Shirley*, although he declares that the meetings of the curates at each other's lodgings were exclusively for a series of two-hours readings of the Greek fathers, and not for the drunken orgies described in *Shirley*.

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* See *A Well Known Character in Fiction*, the true story of Mr. Peter Malone in *Shirley*, by his nephew, Robert Keating Smith, in *The Tatler*, April 2, 1902.

conversation with Charlotte in which she stated that the character was meant for her sister Emily.[1] She said that the presentation of *Shirley* was an attempt to draw Emily, as she would have been if placed in circumstances of health and prosperity. As to Caroline Helstone, there is some discrepancy as to the prototype. Miss Ellen Nussey believed herself to have been intended for Caroline Helstone, while on the other hand Miss Brontë's husband declared that his wife had distinctly denied this to him. Miss Brontë in one of her letters, says:—

"I regret exceedingly that it is not in my power to give any assurance of the substantial existence of Miss Helstone. You must be satisfied if that young lady has furnished your mind with a pleasant idea; she is a native of Dreamland."

We may fairly assume that there was something of Ellen Nussey, something of Anne Brontë, a fragment of herself, and something also of dreamland in "Caroline." "You are not to suppose any of the characters in *Shirley* intended as

[1] *Life*, Haworth Edition, page 30.

literal portraits," she writes to a friend. "It would not suit the rules of art, nor of my own feelings, to write in that style. We only suffer reality to *suggest*, never to *dictate*. The heroines are abstractions, and the heroes also. Qualities I have seen, loved and admired are here and there put in as decorative gems, to be preserved in that setting . . . since you say you could recognize the originals of all except the heroines, pray whom did you suppose the two Moores to represent?"

It is not easy to give an answer to that question as regards Robert Moore, although Mrs. Gaskell remarks that from the sons of the Taylor family she drew "all that there was of truth in the character of the heroes of her first two works."[1] Robert Gerard Moore is obviously a very composite character, but his brother Louis has clearly most of the characteristics of Monsieur Héger, who indeed appears in each novel in succession. He is Professor Crimsworth, Fairfax Rochester, Louis Moore, and Paul Emanuel, under different conditions. The critics who have made much of the

[1] Mrs. Gaskell's *Life*, page 232, Haworth Edition.

enthusiasm with which Charlotte Brontë regarded her Brussels master and friend, might well take note that in *Shirley* she not only attempted to depict what her sister Emily would have been had fortune endowed her with a good estate, but also permitted her fancy to conceive what could have taken place had M. Constantin Héger chanced to have been a tutor exiled from Belgium and placed by accident in the comfortable home of his remarkable pupil. M. Héger, we are told, admired Emily Brontë very much more than he did her sister, and rated her genius higher. The suggestion of the existence of a wild and undisciplined passion for M. Héger, which has been more than once hinted at, might be rejected by any thoughtful reader of *Shirley,* recognizing as he will that Monsieur Héger and his counterpart Louis Moore have as many points in common as have Emily Brontë and Shirley.

Mrs. Humphry Ward has demurred to Moore as a poor effort of creation, and quotes Miss Brontë's own confession:—"When I write about women I am sure of my ground—in the other

case, I am not so sure." Mr. Swinburne is equally contemptuous. Nevertheless the book only attains to real distinction when Louis Moore appears on the scene. The earlier half of it is too didactic, too much concerned with the author's crude theories of social life, and not very profound conceptions of the social problem, of the relation of capital to labour. Not until she resumes the story after the death of her two sisters, not in fact until we reach the chapter entitled "The Valley of the Shadow of Death," do we find the writer on firm ground. It is well to get away from the somewhat cheap satire on the curates, from the tiresome and insipid Caroline, to the various episodes of Shirley's quaint courtship—the interesting facing of the problem of a man's attitude to the woman he loves when she has means and he has none.

Shirley was written under painful circumstances. The first and second volumes were finished while her brother and two sisters were living, the third was begun and the book completed after all three were gone from her. The earlier volumes, written in the turmoil of hope deferred, of melancholy

anticipation of the inevitable, show a great falling off from the power of *Jane Eyre;* but the last volume, written in the unutterable loneliness of bereavement, is quite masterly. "The two human beings who understood me, and whom I understood, are gone," she writes. Yet with the quiet fortitude that was ever her characteristic, she brought her task to a conclusion. The publishers in Cornhill were entirely satisfied, and the book was published in October, 1849. Again, as with *Jane Eyre*, the criticism that she most appreciated came from Eugène Forcade in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. "With that man," she writes, "I would shake hands if I saw him. I would say, 'You know me, Monsieur; I shall deem it an honour to know you.' I could not say so much of the mass of the London critics." At the end of November she paid her fourth visit to London —the first that had in it anything of a social character. She was the guest of her publisher, Mr. George Smith, then a young bachelor living with his mother at Westbourne Place, Bishop's Road. Before leaving Haworth she had had a copy of

her book sent to Harriet Martineau with the following note enclosed:—

"Currer Bell offers a copy of *Shirley* to Miss Martineau's acceptance, in acknowledgment of the pleasure and profit (*sic*) he had derived from her works. When C. B. first read *Deerbrook* he tasted a new and keen pleasure, and experienced a genuine benefit. In his mind *Deerbrook* ranks with the writings that have really done him good, added to his stock of ideas and rectified his views of life."[1]

Miss Martineau replied, addressing her letter to "Currer Bell, Esq.," but beginning it "Dear Madam." On December 8 she received a letter signed "Currer Bell," saying that the writer was in town and desired to see her. Miss Martineau has left an amusing account of the interview, the arrival of a male visitor six feet high, whom some of her friends believed to be the new author, and finally the appearance of "Miss Brontë," whom the footman announced as "Miss Brogden." "I thought her the smallest creature I had ever seen,

[1] Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, vol. 2.

except at a fair," was Miss Martineau's first impression. Miss Brontë saw others of her literary idols, Thackeray in particular, to whom the second edition of *Jane Eyre* was dedicated, and with whom as "A Titan of mind"—she felt "fearfully stupid." In John Forster, afterwards to become known to all as the biographer of Dickens, she discovered a "loud swagger." The best account of the visit is contained in a letter to her friend, Miss Wooler[1] :—

"Ellen Nussey, it seems, told you I spent a fortnight in London last September; they wished me very much to stay a month, alleging that I should in that time be able to secure a complete circle of acquaintance, but I found a fortnight of such excitement quite enough. The whole day was usually spent in sightseeing, and often the evening was spent in society; it was more than I could bear for a length of time. On one occasion I met a party of my critics—seven of them; some of them had been very bitter foes in print, but they were

[1] From *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle*, where the letter is wrongly dated.

prodigiously civil face to face. These gentlemen seemed infinitely grander, more pompous, dashing, showy, than the few authors I saw. Mr. Thackeray, for instance, is a man of quiet simple demeanour; he is however looked upon with some awe and even distrust. His conversation is very peculiar, too perverse to be pleasant. It was proposed to me to see Charles Dickens, Lady Morgan, Mesdames Trollope, Gore, and some others, but I was aware these introductions would bring a degree of notoriety I was not disposed to encounter; I declined, therefore, with thanks."

Taking up the thread of her life once more at Haworth, Charlotte Brontë found the situation well nigh intolerable. Something of the mental anguish that she presents so powerfully as an episode in the life of Lucy Snowe in *Villette* would seem to have visited her at this time, and she was not without her tribulations arising out of the attitude of friends who had taken their cue from the *Quarterly Review* article, or similar pronouncements. There was her own kindly but strait-laced governess, for example:

"I had a rather foolish letter from Miss Wooler the other day. Some things in it nettled me, especially an unnecessary, earnest assurance that, in spite of all I had done in the writing line, I still retained a place in her esteem. My answer took strong and high ground at once. I said I had been troubled by no doubts on the subject; that I neither did her nor myself the injustice to suppose there was anything in what I had written to incur the just forfeiture of esteem. I was aware, I intimated, that some persons thought proper to take exceptions at *Jane Eyre*, and that for their own sakes I was sorry, as I invariably found them individuals in whom the animal largely predominated over the intellectual, persons by nature coarse, by inclination sensual, whatever they might be by education and principle."

The reviews of *Shirley* moreover were not all enthusiastic. Mr. George Henry Lewes, had a not too favourable word to say in the *Edinburgh Review*, which hurt her, and *The Times* review she described as "acrimonious." In a letter to Lewes she demanded to be judged as an *author*,

not as a woman. However she was able about this time to escape from Haworth and to be the guest of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth at Gawthorpe Hall, Lancashire. In June of this year (1850) she was again in London, and saw the Duke of Wellington, the hero of her girlhood, "a real grand old man," received a morning call from Thackeray—"I was moved to speak to him of some of his shortcomings," and had an interview with Lewes, whose face reminded her of her sister Emily's and "almost moved me to tears." This holiday began at the Smiths', and concluded at the Wheelwrights', her Brussels friends.

Writing to a friend from Mrs. Smith's new house at Gloucester Terrace, Hyde Park, she says:—

"Here I feel very comfortable. Mrs. Smith treats me with a serene, equable kindness which just suits me. Her son is, as before, genial and kindly. I have seen very few persons, and am not likely to see many, as the agreement was that I was to be very quiet. We have been to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, to the Opera, and

the Zoological Gardens. The weather is splendid. I shall not stay longer than a fortnight in London. The feverishness and exhaustion beset me somewhat, but not quite so badly as before."

During this stay in London she sat to George Richmond for the only portrait of her that has any real value or authenticity—a crayon drawing presented by Mr. George Smith to her father, and pronounced by Mr. Brontë to be "a correct likeness" and "a graphic representation."[1]

Then followed a short trip to Scotland, Mr. George Smith and his sister being of the party. A few weeks at Brookroyd with her friend Miss Nussey and at Haworth, and she was again on her travels, this time to be the guest of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth at his house, "The Briery," near Bowness. Here she met Mrs. Gaskell, thus forming one of the most momentous friendships in her destiny. "I was truly glad of her com-

[1] This portrait, which has been many times reproduced, occupied the position of honour in the parlour at Haworth until Mr. Brontë's death. It is now hanging in the drawing-room of Mr. Nicholls in his house in Ireland. He has kindly destined it for the National Portrait Gallery of London.

panionship. She is a woman of most genuine talent, of cheerful, pleasing and cordial manners, and I believe of a kind and good heart." [1]

Miss Martineau was away at the time, but Miss Brontë promised her a visit which was paid in December of this same year, 1850. She was glad to escape from her own morbid moods, and was quite unable, as she says, "to bear the canker of constant solitude." In the interval, however, at Haworth, she busied herself by editing her sister's *Remains*. The task laid a great strain upon her, "The reading over of papers, the renewal of remembrances, brought back the pang of bereave-

[1] To Mrs. Gaskell she wrote upon her return to Haworth a letter containing an interesting critique—Mr. Swinburne calls it "inept"—upon Tennyson's newly-published poem:—

"I have read Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, or rather part of it; I closed the book when I got about half-way. It is beautiful; it is mournful; it is monotonous. Many of the feelings expressed bear, in their utterance, the stamp of truth; yes, if Arthur Hallam had been something nearer Alfred Tennyson, his brother instead of his friend, I should have distrusted this rhymed, and measured, and printed monument of grief. What change the lapse of years may work, I do not know; but it seems to me that bitter sorrow, while recent, does not glow in verse."

ment, and occasioned a depression of spirits well-nigh intolerable." The " Introduction " that she wrote to the second edition of *Wuthering Heights* is one of the most striking of her literary achievements. This book was published on December 10, 1850, and a week later she was with Miss Martineau at Ambleside. " She is both hard and warm-hearted, abrupt and affectionate, liberal and despotic "—such was Miss Brontë's sufficient estimate of her hostess. At Ambleside she met Matthew Arnold, " whose manner displeases from its seeming foppery," and whose theological opinions were, she regretted, " very vague and unsettled." Miss Brontë did not live to read *Literature and Dogma* and *God and the Bible*, nor could she have anticipated that the finest recognition of her and her sisters that poetry had to offer would come from the foppish youth she then met for the first and only time. However she tells her friend Miss Wooler, who had an interest in Dr. Arnold, that during this visit she had seen much of the Arnold family, " and daily admired in the widow and children of one of the greatest and best men

of his time, the possession of qualities the most estimable and enduring."

At the end of May, 1851, Miss Brontë is again in London—the time for her longest and most enjoyable visit—tempted thither by Mrs. Smith on account of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park —the Crystal Palace, as it was called. She much enjoyed listening to one of Thackeray's lectures in Willis's Rooms. Here she was introduced to Lord Houghton and other notable contemporaries, and after the lecture she was mobbed by a crowd of admirers as she passed trembling and agitated to the doors. The Exhibition proved a "marvellous, stirring and bewildering sight, but it is not much in my way." She enjoyed more her later visits, particularly one with Sir David Brewster, but she was most at home in hearing D'Aubigné preach; "it was pleasant, half sweet, half sad, to hear the French language once more." How much Rachel, the great French actress—then in London—thrilled her every reader of *Villette* will recall—"she is not a woman, she is a snake." Then she was present at one of Samuel Rogers's

famous breakfasts, which in writing to her father, who loved to hear of her recognition, she tactfully says are "celebrated throughout Europe for their peculiar refinement and taste." Returning from this visit she spent two days with Mrs. Gaskell at Manchester, and when back at home writes to Mrs. Smith, referring to the contrast of the life she has left and the life she is living. "Yet *even* Haworth Parsonage does not look gloomy in this bright summer weather."

Altogether, the years 1850 and 1851, in which she wrote no single novel, were full of interesting impressions for Charlotte Brontë. With all its depressing moods, her life was no longer given up to "darning a stocking, or making a pie in the kitchen of an old parsonage in the obscurest of Yorkshire villages," as she had once described it. She corresponded with all her brothers and sisters of letters, in whose work she was interested: she had met most of them on equal terms. Moreover the kindness of George Smith and his two henchmen, Williams and Taylor, had put her in possession of a great quantity of modern literature,

not perhaps as helpful as the old romances and biographies that she had borrowed so continuously from the Keighley Library, but none the less abounding in a new kind of interest for her ever alert intelligence. Throughout this and the following years, indeed, her letters to these and other London friends deal entirely with the books she had borrowed from them, and they are consequently far more interesting letters than those written in the period of obscurity to the friends of her girlhood. Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, Thackeray's *Esmond*, Borrow's *Bible in Spain*, and many other books of importance are read and criticized with judgment. This last phase of her intellectual development could not but have had some effect upon the crowning literary achievement of Charlotte Brontë's life—the writing of *Villette*.

CHAPTER XV

VILLETTE AND THE PROFESSOR

SOME ten years ago I visited the scene of *Villette,* the Pensionnat Héger at Brussels. The school had just been removed to another quarter of the city, and the house was in an entirely dismantled condition. This enabled me to make a perhaps more intimate acquaintance with the building than I could otherwise have done. It permitted my walking through the various rooms, and tracing in minute detail every aspect of the place that had been so vividly described, partly in *The Professor,* but more in detail in *Villette.* Here was the dormitory, now dismantled of its long succession of beds, in one of which at the further end, Lucy Snowe was frightened by the supposed ghost of a nun. Then we came to the oratory, with the niche no longer holding a crucifix. Finally we passed into the pleasant garden, with its

avenue of trees, and also the "allée défendue" forbidden to all but the teachers, because it was overlooked by the neighbouring boys' school.

A visit to this house in the Rue D'Isabelle enabled one to gauge the minuteness with which Charlotte Brontë had followed every detail of locality during her two years' sojourn in the city she has called "Villette." There were still actually the old pear-trees, the same vine-clad berceau; everything indeed seemingly unchanged during half a century in this quiet retired street in a city which has made huge strides in other directions during that period, which indeed has since then raised in its midst many stately buildings, including the most magnificent law courts in Europe.

It is truly wonderful how vegetation renews itself year by year in much the same form for incalculable periods. Those paths, and grass-plats, could have undergone practically no change whatever in the long interval that separates the day when Charlotte and Emily Brontë walked arm in arm through them, strangely isolated from the mass of their fellow-pupils, yet what changes have

taken place in the great world since those days in 1842! But here in the Brussels that I visited there were many living links with that long ago. I called upon M. Héger, who with his wife had kept this school for so many years. The old professor, who was eighty-five years old at this time, was too ill to see me, and he died two years later. His wife has already been dead for five years. But all his children were flourishing in Brussels, the son as a doctor of distinction, the daughters still retaining the old school, just removed to another building, which must for ever be associated with the Brontë story. It was my privilege to hold a long conversation with Mlle. Héger, the youngest child, the "Georgette" of *Villette*. I found her kindly and communicative, and she gave me some interesting memorials of Charlotte and Emily—exercise books which it was wonderful should have survived from these pupils more than from hundreds of others that had attended the Pensionnat before and after, but which were undoubtedly genuine. The attitude of the Héger family had not always been so tolerant as I found

it, and truly it may be admitted that *Villette* was a hard and a cruel blow, as they and their friends may well have thought. It had been translated into French and read by numbers of acquaintances in Brussels who without being as malicious as the author implied that all Belgians were, yet could not have failed of an inclination to recognize and to identify.

Thus one is not surprised to hear that when Mrs. Gaskell went to Brussels in order to search out material for the *Life*, Madame Héger declined to see her, although M. Héger "was kind and communicative." M. Héger assuredly had less to forgive than his wife. But how indisputably cruel is the portrait of Madame Beck of *Villette* and Mlle. Reuter of *The Professor*. We have undeniable evidence that Madame Héger was a good wife, that she was surrounded even to her death by a circle of friends who esteemed her. We have no reason to suppose that the picture of the Brussels schoolmistress in *Villette* was any more a moral counterpart of Charlotte Brontë's "Madame" than the portrait of Mrs.

Reed in *Jane Eyre* resembled Mrs. Sidgwick, whom the writer also doubtless had in her mind.

Genius is so frequently cruel in its portraiture, and with a certain ostrich-like quality superadded. It never knows that it is cruel and it never anticipates identification. Charles Dickens frequently denied that he had intended Harold Skimpole to represent Leigh Hunt, and he must have been astonished and aggrieved that his friends should insist upon a recognition. Charlotte Brontë was in no similar danger because there was no French translation of *Villette* in her lifetime, but had this not been so she would probably have urged, as is the way with authors, that here as elsewhere was merely a composite picture and not a portrait of an individual. If only such identifications could be thrust aside, our enjoyment and interest in the presentation would be the greater, but that is not possible. Yet if only we can forget its essential cruelty, the portrait grips us. The clever, scheming schoolmistress, watching all the threads of her large establishment with a Napoleonic energy, holds one breathless.

But biography insists upon identification, especially when the writer is pre-eminently a satirist, and if Charlotte Brontë was cruel—artistically cruel—to a woman whom she did not love, that woman has been more than avenged by the persistence with which Miss Brontë's own life has been identified with her heroine Lucy Snowe. A ruthless criticism has punished her in assigning to her own nature, in all outward things so strong, so firm, so full of self-reliance, the sufferings of her heroine when brought face to face with Paul Emanuel. A substantial book has been devoted to this subject,[1] and it would be absurd to ignore it. Hint and innuendo do more harm than a candid facing of the facts. Was Charlotte Brontë then in love with M. Héger? Was she in every respect the counterpart of Lucy Snowe, or Lucy Frost as in the original manuscript she is many times called? Many critics have urged the point while carefully qualifying their position by an insistence that Charlotte Brontë never swerved for a moment from the path of strict moral action, that her

[1] *The Brontës*—Fact and Fiction, by Angus MacKay, 1897.

life will bear the severest searching of the most censorious. But such writers are anxious to prove too much. From Dante to our day poets have cultivated a kind of moral hysteria side by side with a well-balanced common-sense outlook upon life. Charlotte Brontë was the first woman writer to whom the problem of sex appealed with all its complications. Her mood was morbid if you will. She thought much on the question of love, and dwelt continually on the problem of the ideal mate. M. Héger was the only man she had met with real individuality and power, real culture and capacity. The very fact that he recognized Emily Brontë's genius speaks volumes for his perspicuity. It is certain that no other man at that time had the slightest inkling of it.

Charlotte Brontë did not like Madame Héger; theirs were antipathetic natures, and there is nothing more to be said on that point. If Madame Héger had had a taste for fiction and had been a governess say in Miss Margaret Wooler's school at Roehead, she could have made just as unamiable a portrait of Charlotte as the latter did of

her. There is however no derogation of the fair fame of Charlotte Brontë in the assumption of her critics, that she did think of M. Héger as uncongenially mated, that she may at times have allowed herself to contemplate the might-have-beens, the possibility of this man as her own husband had circumstances willed it, or as her sister Emily's husband, as we see she did in *Shirley*. There was nothing wrong in all this, nothing that Mrs. Grundy's most sour disciple could possibly object to. If Charlotte Brontë preaches one thing more than another, it is that we are to conquer all inclinations that are the slightest degree inconsistent with a very strict moral code. Certainly she is very fond of a situation of the type that her critics have assigned to her. Jane Eyre, for example, it will be remembered, falls in love with a man whom she finds too late belongs to another, and so also does Lucy Snowe, in the case of John Bretton.

But surely the critics have made rather too much of the autobiographic nature of *Villette*. They have not sufficiently grasped the fact that an

Born 1809 *Died* 1896

M. Paul Héger

The Hero of Villette and The Professor

artist cultivates emotions in order to make good copy out of them. It is nothing to the point that these emotions made Charlotte Brontë very miserable at times. The real artist is always a creature of moods. It is quite another thing however to suggest that when at Brussels, and suffering, as we know she did suffer, Charlotte Brontë was actually in anguish because she was not and could not be the wife of M. Héger. He was, it is perfectly clear, happily married. No one however has for a moment suggested that Miss Brontë ever attempted to draw from Madame Héger the love of her husband, and really all the letters that have come to light bearing upon that year at Brussels which commenced in the January of 1843, seem to show that she was far from seeing much of M. Héger, and that she was really frightfully lonely. She tells Branwell that she only sees M. Héger once a week or so, and she informed Emily that he had scolded her for her want of sociability, and so concludes:—

"He has already given me a brief lecture on universal *bienveillance,* and, perceiving that I

don't improve in consequence, I fancy he has taken to considering me as a person to be let alone—left to the error of her ways."

* * * * * *

Yet another point has agitated the critics of *Villette*—Charlotte Brontë's religion. She broadened doubtless with the years. The age of Tennyson in poetry, Ruskin and Carlyle in prose, a period when what was called the Broad Church had captured some of the best minds in the Established Religion, could not but have influenced her as she began late in her career to read modern writers. It is clear that her youth was formed upon the older authors, her father's theological guides and her own selection of books from the library at Keighley, where it may safely be assumed new books were seldom forthcoming. Not until W. S. Williams and George Smith began to send her books from London did her mind take on a new aspect of truth. But of this there are few traces in her novels. These reflect the views she had imbibed in her childhood, and were of

that thoroughly Orange complexion which her father had brought with him from Co. Down. When she insists that people should hold by what is "purest in doctrine and simplest in ritual" it is clear that she implies that purity is only to be obtained when ornateness is absent. A violent hatred of Roman Catholicism, indeed, characterizes her first novel, *The Professor*, and her last novel, *Villette*. Her girl pupils in Brussels had an art of "bold, impudent flirtation, or a loose, silly leer." "I am not a bigot in matters of theology," she continues, "but I suspect the root of the precocious impurity, so obvious, so general in Popish countries, is to be found in the discipline, if not the doctrines of the Church of Rome." If she had been able to contrast impartially the moral atmosphere of, let us say, an Irish village and a Yorkshire village, then or now she might have discovered that the root of the matter is elsewhere to seek. Even her father's parish had more than one scandal in her own day. Not even ordinary truthfulness is credited to the religion of the rival communion. "She is even sincere, so far as her

religion would permit her to be so," is her account of one of the pupils in this same novel, *The Professor*, and her heroine is made to say that she longs "to live once more among Protestants; they are more honest than Catholics: these all think it lawful to tell lies." When we come to *Villette*, things are even worse, or better as the reader may choose to interpret it. Methodism receives little more favour. Her Dissenters are nearly all "engrained rascals," as she calls one of them.

But how unimportant it all is, although interesting in a way. Every great writer in every age has been very much in harmony with his environment, and a later age with other views of toleration cares for none of these things, but asks only of the artistic achievement. Two widely different contemporary writers, Charlotte Brontë and George Borrow were at one in their hatred of Romanism. Yet both have received some of their most eloquent appreciation from members of that Church, and in any case it must not be forgotten that Charlotte Brontë's most impressive hero,

Paul Emanuel, was a Roman Catholic, and that she herself "confessed" in a Roman Catholic church.

* * * * * *

Villette is one of the great novels of literature. Mrs. Bretton and Dr. John—pictures to some extent of Mr. George Smith and his mother—Ginevra Fanshawe and Paulina de Bassompierre are very subordinate to the three characters who play their fierce and spirited part on this tiny stage. It is the novel of greatest intensity, of most genuine passion, of most satiric strength in the period in which it appeared. The book will always rank as the principal achievement of its writer.

It is not difficult to understand why her publishers three times during her lifetime declined Miss Brontë's request to publish *The Professor*. Apart from its size—the impossibility of producing it as a three-volumed novel, there were many elements of crudity. Young Cumsworth would scarcely have been ten years at Eton, and would certainly not have carried hence a great capacity for reading and writing French and German. In

any case *Villette* was in many particulars but a rewriting of *The Professor*. The incident of shutting an unruly pupil up in a cupboard is repeated in both stories, and Madame Beck and Mlle. Reuter indulge in much the same manoeuvres with their scholars. Nevertheless *The Professor*[1] is full of good things, and Frances Henri is perhaps the only woman character in Charlotte Brontë's novels of real charm.

* * * * * *

Villette was commenced at the beginning of 1851, but not before she had felt compelled to bow before a third and final refusal of her publisher to accept *The Professor*, a story for which she had evidently a peculiar affection. In May she pays yet another visit to London, this time to see the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. To that visit I have already referred. At this time we find her engaged in quite a copious correspondence, now

[1] The original manuscript, now in the possession of Mr. Thomas Wise, discloses that the book was first called *The Master*.

with her old friends, and now again with her new friends in London. She writes for example to Ellen Nussey, describing a visit to Leeds for the purchase of a bonnet. "I got one which seemed grave and quiet there among all the splendours, but now it looks infinitely too gay with its pink lining. I saw some beautiful silks of pale, sweet colours, but had not the spirit nor the means to launch out at the rate of five shillings per yard, and went and bought a black silk at three shillings after all." While to Mr. Smith she writes enthusiastically concerning Mr. Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, which she had just read through. She heard Cardinal Wiseman address a small meeting. "He came swimming into the room, smiling, simpering and bowing like a fat old lady, and looked the picture of a sleek hypocrite. The Cardinal spoke in a smooth whining manner, just like a canting Methodist preacher," she added. We hear nothing about authorship until September, when in reply to a suggestion by Mr. George Smith that she should give him her next book for serial publication, she replied that "were she possessed

of the experience of a Thackeray, or the animal spirit of a Dickens it might be possible, but even then she would not publish a serial except on condition that the last number was written before the first came out." Her loyalty to her publisher was extreme, for in yet another letter she expresses her deep regret that it was quite impossible for her to oblige him over this question of a serial. At the close of the year there came a long and serious illness, and as she was recovering she stayed for a time with Ellen Nussey. "The solitude of my life I have certainly felt very keenly this winter," she writes to a friend, "but every one has his own burden to bear, and when there is no available remedy it is right to be patient and trust that Providence will in His own good time lighten the load." The first few months of the year 1852 Miss Brontë was struggling back to health. In June of that year she went alone to Filey, on the Yorkshire coast, and took the opportunity of looking at the tombstone of her sister Anne in the churchyard of the old church at Scarborough. Then came a serious illness of her

father, and work on her novel was again postponed. We do not hear more about *Villette* until the October of 1852, when she is able to send her publisher the first half of the book. She is agitated because there is no one to whom she is able to read a single line, or ask a word of counsel. "*Jane Eyre* was not written under such circumstances," she said, "nor were two-thirds of *Shirley*." She would have liked it to be published anonymously, or under some other pseudonym than that of "Currer Bell," but gave way when told by her publishers that it would very much interfere with their interests. Writing to her publisher a little later, she expresses a regret that *Villette* touches no matter of public concern. "I cannot write books handling the topics of the day; it is of no use trying," she said. "Nor can I write a book for its moral." She is pleased that her publisher likes the opening sections of the book, and discusses with him its later stages, as follows:—

"Lucy must not marry Dr. John; he is far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited, and sweet-

tempered; he is a 'curled darling' of Nature and of Fortune, and must draw a prize in life's lottery. His wife must be young, rich, pretty; he must be made very happy indeed. If Lucy marries anybody it must be the Professor—a man in whom there is much to forgive, much to 'put up with.' But I am not leniently disposed towards Miss Frost: from the beginning I never meant to appoint her lines in pleasant places. The conclusion of this third volume it still a matter of some anxiety."

As a matter of fact it would seem that the conclusion of the book gave her considerable trouble. Her father, to whom she read it, was very anxious that it should end well, and that she should make her hero and heroine marry and live happily ever after. Her imagination had however been seized with the idea that Paul Emanuel should lose his life at sea, hence the somewhat ambiguous ending to the book. She did not wish to hurt her father's feelings, but on the other hand she did not wish to go against her artistic conscience. At the end of November, 1852, *Vil-*

lette was finished. "The book, I think," she says, in sending it away, "will not be considered pretentious, nor is it of a character to excite hostility."

After this a week was spent with Ellen Nussey at Brookroyd, a fortnight with Harriet Martineau at Ambleside, and in January the following year she was again in London, staying with her publishers, and correcting the proof-sheets of her novel, the publication of which she deferred until the end of the month in order to give Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth* the start in the papers; and on this matter she writes to her friend, Mrs. Gaskell, to the effect that "*Villette* has no right to push itself before *Ruth;* there is a goodness, a philanthropic purpose, a social use in the latter to which the former cannot for an instant pretend."

Villette was published on January 24, 1853, and was received with general acclamation. Nearly all the reviews were favourable, the principal exception being one written by Miss Martineau in the *Daily News*. Miss Martineau's points of disagreement were twofold—she disagreed with the author on the question of love, and she thought

her unfair to the Roman Catholic Church. On the first point, at any rate, Miss Brontë's reply to her friend was sufficiently effective—"I know what love is, as I understand it, and if man or woman should be ashamed of feeling such love, then is there nothing right, noble, faithful, truthful, unselfish in this earth, as I comprehend rectitude, nobleness, fidelity, truth and disinterestedness." In February she writes from Haworth to thank Mr. George Smith for sending her an engraving of Thackeray's portrait by Lawrence. At this time interest in her personality was growing steadily. The Bishop of the diocese came to see Mr. Brontë, and spent the night in the vicarage. Miss Mulock, the author of *John Halifax, Gentleman*, and other correspondents wrote to her for further particulars as to the fate of Paul Emanuel. In April she was again with Mrs. Gaskell at Manchester, and in September Mrs. Gaskell visited her at Haworth, and we owe to her quite the best description of Miss Brontë's home in these last years of her life.

"I don't know that I ever saw a spot more

exquisitely clean; the most dainty place for that I ever saw. To be sure the life is like clockwork. No one comes to the house; nothing disturbs the deep repose; hardly a voice is heard; you catch the ticking of the clock in the kitchen, or the buzzing of a fly in the parlour all over the house. Miss Brontë sits alone in her parlour, breakfasting with her father in his study at nine o'clock. She helps in the house work; for one of their servants, Tabby, is nearly ninety, and the other only a girl. Then I accompanied her in her walks on the sweeping moors; the heather bloom had been blighted by a thunderstorm a day or two before, and was all of a livid brown colour, instead of the blaze of purple glory it ought to have been. Oh! those high, wild, desolate moors, up above the whole world, and the very realms of silence! Home to dinner at two. Mr. Brontë has his dinner sent in to him. All the small table arrangements had the same dainty simplicity about them. Then we rested, and talked over the clear bright fire; it is a cold country, and the fires gave a pretty warm dancing light all over the house. The parlour has

been evidently refurnished within the last few years, since Miss Brontë's success has enabled her to have a little more money to spend. Everything fits into, and is in harmony with, the idea of a country parsonage, possessed by people of very moderate means. The prevailing colour of the room is crimson, to make a warm setting for the cold grey landscape without. There is her likeness by Richmond, and an engraving from Lawrence's picture of Thackeray; and two recesses, on each side of the high, narrow, old-fashioned mantelpiece, filled with books—books given to her, books she has bought, and which tell of her individual pursuits and tastes; not standard books."

Not less interesting is the account of a mere stranger's visit to Miss Brontë at Haworth in these days of lonely success:—

"I was shown across the lobby into the parlour to the left, and there I found Miss Brontë, standing in the full light of the window, and I had ample opportunity of fixing her upon my memory, where her image is vividly present to this hour. She was diminutive in height, and extremely frag-

ile. Her hand was one of the smallest I ever grasped. She had no pretensions to being considered beautiful, and was as far removed from being plain. She had rather light brown hair, somewhat thin, and drawn plainly over her brow. Her complexion had no trace of colour in it, and her lips were pallid also; but she had a most sweet smile, with a touch of tender melancholy in it. Altogether she was as unpretending, undemonstrative, quiet a little lady as you would well meet. Her age I took to be about five-and-thirty. But when you saw and felt her eyes, the spirit that created Jane Eyre was revealed at once to you. They were rather small, but of a very peculiar colour, and had a strange lustre and intensity. They were chameleon-like, a blending of various brown and olive tints. But they looked you through and through—and you felt they were forming an opinion of you, not by mere acute noting of Lavaterish physiognomical peculiarities, but by a subtle penetration into the very marrow of your mind, and the innermost core of your soul. Taking my hand again, she apologised for her en-

forced absence, and, as she did so, she looked right through me. There was no boldness in the gaze, but an intense, direct, searching look, as of one who had the gift to read hidden mysteries, and the right to read them. I had a feeling that I never experienced before or since, as though I was being mesmerised."

Through the closing months of 1853 and the early part of 1854 Miss Brontë, living quietly at Haworth, was principally occupied in nursing her father, who was getting very old and very blind. In April however she was able to announce to her friends that she was engaged to be married to her father's curate, and on June 29 of this year, 1854, Charlotte Brontë became Mrs. Arthur Bell Nicholls.

CHAPTER XVI

MARRIAGE AND DEATH

"I THINK he must be like all the curates I have seen," Charlotte Brontë writes of one of them. "They seem to me a self-seeking, vain, empty race." Her experience had certainly been exceptionally wide, for until she went to Brussels at twenty-six years of age she had met but few other men in her father's house. Curates there had been in abundance. To the three individuals described in *Shirley*, one may add at least six others, and two of them desired to marry Miss Brontë—Mr. Bryce and Mr. Nussey. Mr. Bryce proposed by letter after one meeting, Mr. Nussey also declared himself in similar fashion, and received in return much good advice as to choosing a wife which, as we have seen, he quickly took—in a fashion. Miss Brontë had become famous when the next proposal of marriage came to her. This was from

Mr. James Taylor, who was in the employment of her publishers. The firm suggested to Miss Brontë that Mr. Taylor should come to Haworth for the manuscript of *Shirley*, and her reply gave an interesting glimpse of her peculiarly isolated life. She told Mr. W. S. Williams that she could not offer any male society as companions in the neighbourhood, that her father "without being in the least misanthropical or sour-natured, habitually prefers solitude to society." Under these circumstances Miss Brontë suggests that if Mr. Taylor still desires to come for the manuscript, he should only stay the one day. Mr. Taylor came, and it is clear quickly lost his heart, and showed, moreover, much more persistency than earlier lovers. He began to lend her newspapers and books, and went so far as to half propose, only to be snubbed into silence for a period of nine months, when he reappeared, or rather his favourite newspaper, which came once again through the post to Haworth. It was the *Athenæum* which formed the singular medium of this quaint courtship. There are many references in

Charlotte Brontë's letters to her friend Ellen Nussey which seem to indicate that with still a little more persistency James Taylor—"the little man," as she calls him—might have won his suit, the more particularly as he had a strong ally in her father, and touched her by a certain resemblance to her brother Branwell. However his firm sent him to India, and he accepted as final Miss Brontë's definite refusal. He wrote to her occasionally from Bombay, and her letters to him have been published.[1] When he returned to England in 1856 Charlotte Brontë was dead.

Miss Brontë's fourth and this time successful lover was Mr. Arthur Bell Nicholls, her father's curate: one of that detested race which she had satirized so bitterly in *Shirley*, and made so many contemptuous references to in her letters. Of Mr. Nicholls, however, she had early formed a kindly judgment. Born in 1817, he was a Scot by origin, an Irishman of Co. Antrim by birth. He was educated at the Royal School at Banagher by his uncle, the Rev. Alan Bell, the headmaster. From

[1] In *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle.*

Trinity College, Dublin, he passed in 1844 to the curacy of Haworth, in succession to Mr. Smith, the "Malone" of *Shirley*. In that novel, written, it will be remembered, in 1849, he is pictured as Mr. Macarthey:—"I am happy to be able to inform you *with truth* that this gentleman did as much credit to his country as Malone had done it discredit. . . . He laboured faithfully in the parish: the schools, both Sunday and day-schools, flourished under his sway like green bay-trees. Being human, of course he had his faults; these however were proper, steady-going clerical faults, which many would call virtues: the circumstance of finding himself invited to tea with a Dissenter would unhinge him for a week. . . ."

In 1846 Miss Brontë repudiated her friend's suggestion that she was going to marry Mr. Nicholls. "He and his fellow curates," she said, "regard me as an old maid, and I regard them, one and all, as highly uninteresting, narrow and unattractive specimens of the coarser sex."

Mr. Nicholls however had his moment of triumph, as we have seen, when *Shirley* appeared,

and thereon Miss Brontë wrote to her friend that he had greeted the book with "roars of laughter." "He would read all the scenes about the curates aloud to papa. He triumphed in his own character." Two years later Mr. Nicholls appeared in a more tragic rôle. He asked his vicar's daughter to marry him. This was in December, 1852. The incident, indispensable in the life story of Charlotte Brontë, is best told in her own words:—

"On Monday evening Mr. Nicholls was here to tea. I vaguely felt without clearly seeing, as without seeing I have felt for some time, the meaning of his constant looks, and strange, feverish restraint. After tea I withdrew to the dining-room as usual. As usual, Mr. Nicholls sat with papa till between eight and nine o'clock; I then heard him open the parlour door as if going. I expected the clash of the front door. He stopped in the passage; he tapped; like lightning it flashed on me what was coming. He entered; he stood before me. What his words were you can guess; his manner you can hardly realize, nor can I forget it. Shaking from head to foot, looking deadly

pale, speaking low, vehemently, yet with difficulty, he made me for the first time feel what it costs a man to declare affection where he doubts response.

"The spectacle of one ordinarily so statue-like thus trembling, stirred, and overcome, gave me a kind of strange shock. He spoke of sufferings he had borne for months, of sufferings he could endure no longer, and craved leave for some hope. I could only entreat him to leave me then, and promise a reply on the morrow. I asked him if he had spoken to papa. He said he dared not. I think I half led, half put him out of the room.

"When he was gone I immediately went to papa, and told him what had taken place. Agitation and anger disproportionate to the occasion ensued; if I had loved Mr. Nicholls and had heard such epithets applied to him as were used, it would have transported me past my patience; as it was, my blood boiled with a sense of injustice. But papa worked himself into a state not to be trifled with: the veins on his temples started up like whipcord, and his eyes became suddenly bloodshot. I

made haste to promise that Mr. Nicholls should on the morrow have a distinct refusal.

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"You must understand that a good share of papa's anger arises from the idea, not altogether groundless, that Mr. Nicholls has behaved with disingenuousness in so long concealing his aim. I am afraid also that papa thinks a little too much about his want of money; he says the match would be a degradation, that I should be throwing myself away, that he expects me, if I marry at all, to do very differently; in short, his manner of viewing the subject is on the whole far from being one in which I can sympathize. My own objections arise from a sense of incongruity and uncongeniality in feelings, tastes, principles."

Here clearly was the first lover who realized in a measure the ideal of love that Charlotte Brontë had pictured in her dreams and in her stories—a passionate man full of devotion, above all suspicion of wanting a wife for her intellectual attainments or literary achievements. Whatever uncongeniality there may have been in these par-

ticulars was more than atoned for by her father's action. A woman hates injustice to a man who pays her the compliment of being in love with her, and she is nearly always in love with love. As a natural consequence a few months found Charlotte Brontë deeply devoted to Mr. Nicholls, who had betaken himself to another curacy at Kirk-Smeaton by May of 1853, after five months of difficulty and unpleasantness with Mr. Brontë. His successor did not please, and to the complaints of her father Miss Brontë had a ready retort. She loved Mr. Nicholls, and corresponded with him. If she married him they could live at the rectory, and Mr. Brontë's old age would be secured from trouble. To a man, very old and very nearly blind, this was well-nigh an unanswerable appeal, and Mr. Brontë relented. Mr. Nicholls exchanged back to Haworth, and the wedding took place at Haworth Church on June 29, 1854, Mr. Sutcliffe Sowden, one of Mr. Nicholls' friends, performing the ceremony, Miss Wooler giving the bride away, and Miss Ellen Nussey being the only bridesmaid.

The honeymoon was passed in Ireland—in a run through Kerry and Cork Counties, and a stay with her husband's relatives at Banagher in Kings Co. "I must say I like my new relations," she writes, "my dear husband, too, appears in a new light in his own country. More than once I had deep pleasure in hearing his praises on all sides. . . . I pray to be enabled to repay as I ought the affectionate devotion of a truthful, honourable man."

And upon her return to Haworth she writes:

"Dear Nell, during the last six weeks the colour of my thoughts is a good deal changed: I know more of the realities of life than I once did. I think many false ideas are propagated, perhaps unintentionally. I think those married women who indiscriminately urge their acquaintances to marry, much to blame. For my own part, I can only say with deepest sincerity and fuller significance what I always said in theory, 'Wait God's will.' Indeed, indeed, Nell, it is a solemn and strange and perilous thing for a woman to become a wife. Man's lot is far, far different. . . . Have

I told you how much better Mr. Nicholls is? He looks quite strong and hale; he gained twelve pounds during the first four weeks in Ireland. To see this improvement in him has been a main source of happiness to me, and to speak truth, a subject of wonder too."

The letters that follow clearly indicate that love had followed respect and esteem, as had been her "theory" of marriage, and that she was becoming entirely devoted to her husband. These few months of married life were, it is certain, quite the happiest of her life. We hear little, indeed, of authorship—but they know little of authorship who think that happiness in any robust sense and the writing of works of imagination are synonymous terms. The months that Charlotte Brontë was writing her books were probably the most unhappy of her life. Now she took on domestic duties. "The married woman can call but a very small portion of each day her own," she writes.

But her end was approaching. Charlotte Brontë had been but nine months a wife when she died of an illness incidental to childbirth on

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The Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls

The husband of Charlotte Brontë, to whom she was married June 29, 1854

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March 31, 1855. In a letter to a friend from her deathbed she writes, "I want to give you an assurance which I know will comfort you: that is that I find in my husband the tenderest nurse, the kindest support, the best earthly comfort that ever woman had. His patience never fails, and it is tried by sad days and broken nights." Then came the last words to her husband—surely as pathetic as any in the whole range of literary biography. "I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us, we have been so happy."

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Charlotte Nicholls was buried beside her mother, her brother Branwell, and her sister Emily in the family vault in Haworth Church. For the six years that followed his wife's death Mr. Nicholls stayed on at Haworth. At the death of Mr. Brontë he removed to Ireland, gave up the Church as a profession, and engaged in farming—an occupation he has pursued for nearly fifty years.

The present writer first met Mr. Nicholls in

1895. It was on the anniversary of the great novelist's death-day—March 31—fifty years earlier. Mr. Nicholls met me at Banagher station, as I alighted from the Dublin train. Banagher in Kings Co. is situated on the Shannon. It has been immortalized by a phrase—"That bangs Banagher." At the end of the village, near by the Protestant Church, stood the pleasant farm-house in which the former curate of Haworth was passing his declining years. The house was singularly interesting in its multitude of Brontë relics. On the walls of the drawing-room were Richmond's portrait of Charlotte Brontë, the engravings of Thackeray and Wellington that so delighted her heart, water-colour drawings by all three sisters, perhaps most noticeable, crude but not the less interesting, Emily's picture of her dog "Keeper" and Anne's "Flossy." On the staircase was a portrait of Branwell. I noted the two rocking-chairs so frequently occupied by the younger sisters in their last illness—in fact the whole house abounded in pathetic memories of that strangely different life in far away Yorkshire. It almost seemed as

if the wraiths of the immortal sisters had revisited the land of their fathers—a land which with all its romance and poetry had made no impression upon them when they lived, although, as I have said, Charlotte Brontë spent some happy weeks there soon after marriage, and indeed had stayed in this very house.

But what of Mr. Nicholls? I had almost been prepared for a narrow-minded, limited, austere man. I had read estimates of him that inclined to this view. Miss Ellen Nussey, the very personification of loyalty to the memory of her dear friend, was nevertheless not kindly disposed to Mr. Nicholls. From her Mrs. Gaskell had imbibed a prejudice that is expressed in more than one letter I have seen. Mr. Nicholls had his idiosyncrasies, as have most of us, and no one could face the life of a country village without incurring prejudice and misunderstanding. The author of *Cranford* might well realize that. In any case time, we may assume, had softened down many angularities in Mr. Nicholls, as it softens them with most men, and the genial man who shook hands with me at Banagher station,

carried me off in his jaunting car to his pleasant home and introduced me to his kindly family circle was an entirely benign and liberal-minded man, with no remnants in his nature of that intolerance and pedantry that may or may not have been in his nature half a century earlier. He was keenly interested in everything that was going on in the great world, very gratified at the universal recognition of his wife's genius, and greatly appreciative of the homage that was now offered on all sides.[1]

[1] Mr. Nicholls was full of kindly memories of old Mr. Brontë. He denied the many rumours that had so long flourished about his eccentricities, while admitting that he had a temper on occasions. He thought the earlier opposition to his marriage not unnatural in a man who had learnt to value his daughter very highly. "I had less than a hundred a year at the time," he remarked.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GLAMOUR OF THE BRONTËS

JUST as a love of Milton's *Lycidas* has been proclaimed to be a touchstone of taste in poetry, so I think may an appreciation of the Brontë novels be counted as a touchstone of taste in prose literature. This is more particularly the case so far as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is concerned. Not to realize the high qualities of that masterpiece of fiction is to be blind indeed to all the conditions which go to make a great book. *Wuthering Heights* is indeed unique in modern literature; it is entirely independent of all the fiction that had gone before. Because Emily Brontë learnt German and doubtless read many an eerie German story, it has been suggested that this was a literature that influenced her materially; because she had an Irish father, who may or may not have told tales by the fireside recalling his boy-

hood, it has been claimed that here was the material upon which she worked. Not one of these suppositions will bear examination. The only external influence that would seem to have made this wonderful book were those wild and silent moors that the writer loved so well, and where we are sure from earliest childhood she constantly kept solitary communion with all the weird phantasies of her brain.

This element of mystery in all that concerned Emily Brontë, the absence of a single line from her to any correspondent furnishing some revelation of character, the non-existence even of a portrait bearing the faintest resemblance to her, the few casual glimpses of a personality that loved dogs more than human beings, of a nature that was quite unlike to many thousands of her fellow countrywomen that were born into the world in these same days of the first quarter of the last century—all these, combined with the fact that every critic without exception that has been brought into contact with her poetry and prose has found it glorious, and you have here at least one

element that provides a glamour to the story of the Brontës.

A second element of this glamour is furnished by the circumstance of the very existence of a family of four children, all of them with a taste for writing, and all of them destined to die young. Branwell and Anne are but quite minor figures in this strange drama, but that one family should have produced two young girls of the calibre of Emily and Charlotte is of itself an unique circumstance in English literature. Emily the reticent, whose pages give forth not one single scrap of self-revelation, who is as impersonal as Shakspere, revealed only in certain poems that hers was on the whole a sombre pagan outlook upon life, in which the riddle of the universe is found to be insoluble. Charlotte on the other hand offering us an entire contrast, taking us so abundantly into her confidence alike in her letters and her books. She has an opinion upon every subject. Here is indeed no lack whatever of self-revelation, and very piquant it all is. We know Charlotte Brontë's attitude on the relation of capital and

labour, on the virtues of revealed religion, by which she usually meant the tenets of the Church of England, on books and on men; there was not a single human being, with the exception of her own father, that she did not permit herself to criticise with the utmost frankness. Her girl friends, and the literary friends of later years, every casual acquaintance indeed, equally came under that satiric touch. The personal note was not quite as common in literature then as it is to-day, and that is why Charlotte Brontë's correspondence will always have an attraction of its own. Added to this, it is indisputable that she was a singularly great novelist. It has recently been suggested that the popularity of her books is on the wane. The idea probably arises from the experiences of one or two publishers, but a dozen publishers at least are at present engaged in issuing the Brontë novels, and from inquiries I have made I am satisfied that while not, and rightly, holding the same vogue as do Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, she comes next to them in general acceptance among the English novelists of the past.

It is true she has limitations, most obvious in *Shirley,* but to be found in a measure in all her books; a kindly benevolent outlook upon life there is not. Some of her pictures of men and women were grotesque even when written; they are doubly grotesque to-day without being far enough away from us to enable us to feel that she is giving us a picture of a bygone era. But when all limitations are conceded, there still remain to us great books, full of interest, of imperishable character drawing. Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, Rochester and Paul Emanuel, with a number of minor characters are all drawn with a master touch, and while new books must necessarily ever displace the old with the majority of readers, there will never, we may be sure, be a time when a student of literature will not find it essential to make the acquaintance of this famous gallery of creations, that filled so large a space in the reading of an earlier generation. These books must be read if only for their style, if only for their fine passionate phrases, they must be read still more for their fine moral and intellectual qualities, for the stern sense of duty

that belongs to them, the scorn of all meanness and trickery, the wonderful grasp of the hard facts of life, of the stern facts of our being. "Life is a battle," she said. "God grant that we may all be able to fight it well." They will be read above all because more truly than any other writer in our fiction, Charlotte Brontë has pictured an ideal of love which will always make its appeal to many hearts. In her books we find the passionate devotion of one human being to another, growing more intense with time, based partly on intellectual sympathy, partly on spiritual affinity, and yet again upon absorbing passion. Most of our writers love only to depict the casual devotion based on a pretty face or a charming disposition. Further, they have not dared to go until our own time when the sex novelist has gone too far.

Finally in considering this question of the glamour of the Brontës, we come again to the point of vivid interest that they have been able to excite through their own personality. What could be more marked in this way than the note

that Charlotte Brontë wrote five years before she died, concerning her sisters, some passages from which have already been quoted in this little book, and another and longer passage may well be quoted here:—

"About five years ago," wrote Miss Brontë in 1850, "my two sisters and myself, after a prolonged period of separation, found ourselves reunited, and at home. Resident in a remote district, where education had made little progress, and where, consequently, there was no inducement to social intercourse beyond our own domestic circle, we were wholly dependent on ourselves and each other, on books and study, for the enjoyments and occupations of life. The highest stimulus, as well as the liveliest pleasure, we had known from childhood upwards lay in attempts at literary composition. We had very early cherished the dream of becoming authors. This dream, never relinquished, even when distance divided and absorbing tasks occupied us, now suddenly acquired strength and consistency. It took the character of a resolve. We agreed to arrange a small selection of

our poems, and, if possible, get them printed. Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because—without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine'—we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality and for their reward a flattery which is not true praise. The bringing out of our little book was hard work. As was to be expected, neither we nor our poems were at all wanted; but for this we had been prepared at the outset. Though inexperienced ourselves, we had read the experience of others. Through many obstacles a way was at last made, and the book was printed; it did not obtain much favourable criticism, and is scarcely known; but ill-success failed to crush us; the mere effort to succeed had

given a wonderful zest to existence; it must be pursued. We each, therefore, set to work on a prose tale."

* * * * * *

And then that final tribute to her sisters' memories:—"I may sum up all by saying that for strangers they were nothing; for superficial observers less than nothing; but for those who had known them all their lives in the intimacy of close relationship, they were genuinely good, and truly great."

Some six years after this tribute had been paid, there came that splendid recognition by Mrs. Gaskell, an accomplished writer who has added more than one book of enduring reputation to our literature. With so fine an imagination it was only natural that she should write a beautiful book, a book calculated still further to kindle popular interest. It is not too much to say that Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* has received as enthusiastic praise from the critics as any one of her own novels, or even the novels of the friend whose

fame she was to assist so largely. There are those who have read that biography who have never read the novels, and have found in its pathetic story so effectively told a charm which pertains to few biographies. I recall, however, a visit to Mr. Brontë's successor at Haworth,[1] in which that gentleman, after courteously showing me over the house, in which he had made many marked improvements, and to which he had added many material comforts, took down from a shelf his copy of Mrs. Gaskell's book and pointed out the old-fashioned engraving of the parsonage as the Brontës knew it. "Is that anything like the place?" he asked triumphantly, wishing to emphasise what he considered the exaggeration of its dreariness. It is not much like the Haworth of to-day, but it is not unlike the spot as the Brontë children knew it, and indeed, Mary Taylor writing to thank Mrs. Gaskell for "a true picture of a melancholy life," declared that it was "not so gloomy as the truth," and that her friend

[1] The Rev. John Wade, who was incumbent of Haworth from 1861 to 1898.

Charlotte Brontë, "a woman of first-rate talents, industry and integrity," had lived all her life "in a walking nightmare of 'poverty and self-suppression.'"

Following upon Mrs. Gaskell's notable picture of the life of the Brontë sisters, we have had not a few brilliant criticisms of their books. A long succession of able men and women have in the succeeding years offered homage at this shrine. Mr. Swinburne has described Charlotte Brontë as "a woman of the first order of genius," and has not hesitated to place Emily still higher. But perhaps, after all, the finest tribute to the genius of Charlotte Brontë comes from Thackeray, who after her death introduced a fragment of her work called *Emma*[1] to the readers of the *Cornhill Magazine*. "I fancied an austere little Joan of Arc marching in upon us and rebuking our easy lives, our easy morals! She gave me," he tells us, "the impression of being a very pure, and lofty,

[1] There were only some three small fragments of manuscript left at Miss Brontë's death, all apparently written after *Villette*, but not one of them of any real significance.

and high minded person. A great and holy reverence of right and truth seemed to be with her always. Who that has known her books has not admired the artist's noble English, the burning love of truth, the bravery, the simplicity, the indignation at wrong, the eager sympathy, the pious love and reverence, the passionate honour, so to speak, of the woman? What a story is that of the family of poets in their solitude yonder on the gloomy Yorkshire moors!"

APPENDIX

THE following letters written to the brother of the friend whose marriage was under contemplation are interesting. The first is from Upperwood House, Rawdon:—

"I am about to employ part of a Sunday evening in answering your letter. You will perhaps think this hardly right, and yet I do not feel that I am doing wrong. Sunday evening is almost my only time of leisure, no one would blame me if I were to spend this spare time in a pleasant chat with a friend. Is it worse to spend it in writing a friendly letter?

"I have just seen my little noisy charges deposited snugly in their cribs—and I am sitting alone in the schoolroom with the quiet of a Sunday evening pervading the grounds and gardens outside my window. I owe you a letter—can I choose a better time than the present for paying my debt?

Now you need not expect any gossip or news, I have none to tell you—even if I had I am not at present in the mood to communicate them—you will excuse an unconnected letter. If I had thought you critical or captious I would have declined the task of corresponding with you. When I reflect indeed—it seems strange that I should sit down to write without a feeling of formality and restraint to an individual with whom I am personally so little acquainted as I am with yourself—but the fact is, I cannot be formal in a letter; if I write at all, I must write as I think. It seems your sister has told you that I am become a governess again—as you say, it is indeed a hard thing for flesh and blood to leave home, especially a *good* home—not a wealthy or splendid one—my home is humble and unattractive to strangers, but to me it contains what I shall find nowhere else in the world—the profound and intense affection which brothers and sisters feel for each other when their minds are cast in the same mould, their ideas drawn from the same source—when they have clung to each other from childhood and

when family disputes have never sprung up to divide them.

"We are all separated now, and winning our bread amongst strangers as we can—my sister Anne is near York, my brother in a situation near Halifax, I am here, Emily is the only one left at home, where her usefulness and willingness make her indispensable. Under these circumstances, should we repine? I think not—our mutual affection ought to comfort us under all difficulties—if the God on whom we must all depend will but vouchsafe us health and the power to continue in the strict line of duty, so as never under any temptation to swerve from it an inch—we shall have ample reason to be grateful and contented.

"I do not pretend to say that I am always contented; a governess must often submit to have the heart-ache. My employers, Mr. and Mrs. White, are kind, worthy people in their way, but the children are indulged. I have great difficulties to contend with sometimes—perseverance will perhaps conquer them—and it has gratified me much to find that the parents are well satisfied with their

children's improvement in learning since I came. But I am dwelling too much upon my own concerns and feelings. It is true they are interesting to me, but it is wholly impossible they should be so to you, and therefore I hope you will slip the last page, for I repent having written it.

"A fortnight since I had a letter from your sister urging me to go to Brookwyd for a single day. I felt such a longing to have a respite from labour and to get once more amongst 'old familiar faces' that I conquered diffidence and asked Mrs. White to let me go. She complied, and I went accordingly and had a most delightful holiday. I saw your mother, your sisters, and brothers; all were well. Ellen talked of endeavouring to get a situation somewhere. I did not encourage the idea much—I advised her rather to go to you for a while. I think she wants a change, and I daresay you would be glad to have her as a companion for a few months.

"I inquired if there was any family of the name of Barrett in this neighbourhood, but I cannot hear of any such, though I understand there is a Mr.,

Mrs., and Miss Barwick—the name in pronunciation sounds very similar.

"My time is out. With sincere good wishes for your welfare and kind love to your sister."

"I think I told you I had heard something of Mr. Lincoln's affair before, but I thought from the long interval that had elapsed between his visit to Brookwyd and his late declaration that some impediment had occurred to prevent his proceeding further. I own I am glad to hear that this is not the case, for I know few things that would please me better than to hear of Ellen's being *well* married. This little adverb *well* is, however, a condition of importance; it implies a great deal—fitness of character, temper, pursuits, and competency of fortune. Your description of Mr. Lincoln seems to promise all these things; there is but one word in it that appears exceptionable—you say he is *eccentric*. If his eccentricity is not of a degrading or ridiculous character—if it does not arise from weakness of mind—I think Ellen would hardly be justified in considering it a serious

objection; but there is a species of eccentricity which, showing itself in silly and trifling forms, often exposes its possessor to ridicule—this, as it must necessarily weaken a wife's respect for her husband, may be a great evil. I have advised Ellen as strongly as my limited knowledge of the business gives me a right to do, to accept Mr. Lincoln in case he should make decided proposals. In consequence of this advice, she seems to suspect that I have had some hand in helping 'to cook a certain hash which has been concocted at Earnley.' I use her own words, which I cannot interpret, for I do not comprehend them—you can clear me of any such underhand and meddling dealings. What I have had to say on the subject has been said entirely to herself, and it amounted simply to this: 'If Mr. Lincoln is a good, honourable, and respectable man, take him, even though you should not at present feel any violent affection for him—the folly of what the French call "une grande passion" is not consistent with your tranquil character; do not therefore wait for such a feeling. If Mr. Lincoln be sensible and good-

tempered, I do not doubt that in a little while you would find yourself very happy and comfortable as his wife.'

"You will see by these words that I am no advocate for the false modesty which you complain of, and which induces some young ladies to say 'No' when they mean 'Yes.' But if I know Ellen, she is not one of this class—she ought not therefore to be too closely urged; let her friends state their opinion and give their advice, and leave it to her own sense of right and reason to do the rest. It seems to us better that she should be married—but if *she* thinks otherwise, perhaps she is the best judge. We know many evils are escaped by eschewing matrimony, and since so large a proportion of the young ladies of these days pursue that rainbow-shade with such unremitting eagerness, let us respect an exception who turns aside and pronounces it only a coloured vapour whose tints will fade on a close approach."

THE END

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